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瑞智士記

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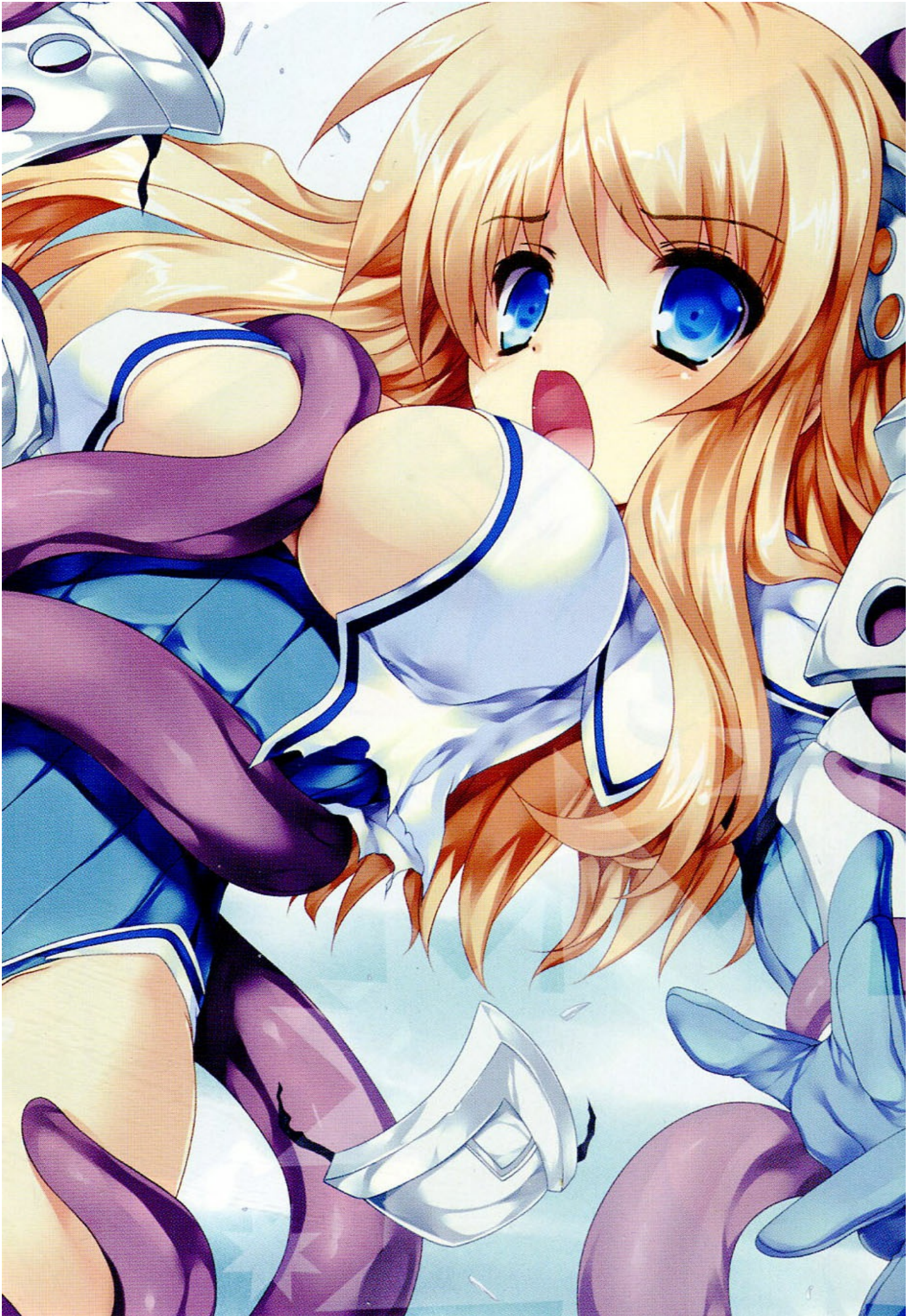




「ラクエルⅣ世猊下の指南役にも選ばれた、
このわたくしの剣技——その身で受ける
覚悟はあるかしら？」

すさまじい闘気が吹きつけてくる。
かつて、セレスを鍛えあげたラフォン家の教官たちを、
はるかに凌ぐ気迫である。







「ぶっ、無礼な……
そ、それ以上はやめっ……
あんっ！」
ついに、ヴェロニカは喘いだ。



「ナヴィーだって、
俺にとっては大切な仲間なんだ」

「えっ……？」

「俺はナヴィーを失いたくない。
絶対にだ」

「そ、そんなことをいわれても……
困るわ」





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ごきげんよう、コハダです。

今回は初の2キャラ表紙です！

いやー前巻の登場時にはオスカーだけでセシスのカラーを描く機会が無かったのて
セシスを塗れて大満足！そして久しぶりのカラー触手（笑）

今回は聖騎甲多め！のモノクロではより、萌え&格好良く見えるように
色々新しいやり方を試してみました！

ますますヒートアップする物語に刺激されてコハダのイラストも
更なるレベルアップをしていきたい第七巻です！

髪のをまとめるオスカーの図



Prologue

The continent of Ark Strada.

Looking down towards it from the sky;

It was shaped like a dragon spreading its wings;

On it were five forces that were kept in balance.

I The dragon's wing ~ Holy Espada Agency.

II The dragon's body ~ Chevron Kingdom.

III The dragon's jaw ~ Zepharos Empire.

IV The dragon's tail ~ Labrock Trade Union.

Also,

V The dragon's heart ~ Lautreamont Knight Country

Part 1

Dinner time was about to begin in an hour; everyone working in the kitchen of the castle had a tense expression and seemed to be emitting a vicious pressure. However, as if to break apart this atmosphere as if it were as thin as ice—

—Clang!

A booming voice reverberated throughout the kitchen.

“What are you doing!? Celestina! How many pieces have you broken now!?”

The chef immediately shouted.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

The seven year old maid desperately apologised, and crouched down on the spot to clean it up. Small fragments of the shattered dish were all over the floor. The cost of one of these dishes might have been enough to pay for one’s living expenses for several months...for the lowest ranking maid who was still only capable of washing the dishes, this was an astronomical figure. After she slowly cleaned up the debris of the dish, she suddenly felt a painful prick at her fingertips.

“What are you doing so slowly!? You useless trash!”

The chef revealed a terrifying face as he roared at her.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Guu...”

Celestina began to sob and cry. Because she had been born with an ‘abnormal’ left eye, tears only flowed out from her right eye. After she stretched out her dirty cuffs and wiped her tears away, she ran to pick up a broom.

“Kyah!”

The result of her running caused her to crash into the maid who was carrying the dishes of food. Celestina’s eye clearly captured the scene of the extravagant

palace cuisine being knocked to the ground. What had fallen onto the floor was a stew of Chevron beef leg braised with red wine.

“Gulp...”

Sitting on the floor, Celestina almost subconsciously reached out her hand for the piece of meat which lay on the floor. Although it had fallen onto the floor, she usually did not ever have an opportunity to eat such high-grade beef...

“Oh my, look at this child’s greedy face! How shameful!”

The stern scolding drew Celestina’s mind back to reality.

The older maids surrounded Celestina on all sides as they watched her with surprise and contempt. All of them were adopted daughters of the Lafon family. To Celestina, they were equivalent to being her older sisters.

“How can such incompetent trash like you become a daughter of the Lafon family?”

“Because the Royal Family endorsed her.”

“Oh that’s right, I heard that Prince Uriel retrieved her from somewhere as a gift to His Majesty.”

“A whim of His Majesty the Prince has really brought us a lot of trouble. Why did he have to pick this child—”

“That’s enough, you guys!”

At that time, a maid with a livid expression suddenly shouted. It was as if they were looking at the face of death as they all stared towards the doorway. Her frightening presence suddenly spread fear to all of the maids who were present. Everyone stopped what they were doing, and looked towards the door. Even that fearsome chef was kneeling on the ground.

“—Sorry for disturbing everyone’s work.”

An extravagantly dressed noble appeared in the doorway. To hamper one’s progress, that was exactly what had just happened. The valiant and heroic figure who stood in the messy doorway — was the Third Prince, Uriel. —Uriel Alfred Seevers de la Rosa Chevron. He was the man who changed Celestina’s life. A few years ago, Uriel heard about the rumours of Celestina, and travelled

a long distance to reach a remote village. Hailed as a 'rare species' Celestina was taken away from the village and was given to Zacharias III. The memory of when she first saw Zacharias III abruptly flashed across Celestina's mind. After the majestic Chevron King gazed at Celestina's left eye with concentration, he said to Uriel

—That left eye...is the same as what was written in the ancient literature records. This should be proof of the <Pluto Children>

—So you also knew this, father?

—You shouldn't underestimate this King, Uriel. This girl will be handed over to the Lafon family to take care of her education. Be sure to let her become the right-hand of the King in the future, and she will devote her life to the king.

Like that, Celestina became an adopted daughter of the Lafon family. Because her mother was sickly and lived in poverty, Celestina had no other choice. But with the thought of doing this to allow her mother to live a good life at home, the confusion in her heart disappeared. The reason why her biological father abandoned the family was because Celestina's magic eye made him feel terrified. Her mother was the opposite of her father, and poured her love into her daughter, and endured struggles to raise her single-handedly. As a result, it also caused her body to deteriorate... As long as she endured this suffering, her mother would be able to receive financial assistance. With money, she would be able to afford medicine to recuperate. As soon as she turned things around and thought in this way, she didn't think that the bitterness that she suffered was significant at all—

Having appeared in the kitchen, the only thing that Uriel saw in his eyes was Celestina sitting on the floor.

Why is someone of such a noble status in the kitchen himself?

But presently, Celestina felt so ashamed that it was as if her entire body was on fire, and she did not care about that issue. She was afraid that her irresistible greed in wanting to pick up the piece of meat from the stew which had fallen onto the ground was seen by Uriel. Uriel walked over to Celestina's side, and then politely stretched out his hand. The gesture was almost like a gentleman who was inviting a lady to dance.

“Celestina. This place is no longer worthy of your presence.”

“Eh...?”

Celestina tilted her head with a slightly puzzled expression.

“It’s my father’s orders. From today onwards, you are to be my younger brother’s exclusive servant.”

Part 2

A few days after setting out from the capital of Arkham by horse carriage—.

Brailsford was a renowned military family. In terms of their quality of life as aristocrats, their house was quite simple, their decorations were rather minimal, and overall it seemed to be an old-fashioned building. Even the furniture that was placed in the reception room also evoked a thick, rugged, and country-style appearance. Perhaps because the family was interested in hunting, the walls were lined with no small number of bird and animal specimens as decorations. As soon as she was brought to the reception room, Celestina came face to face with a boy who was similar in age to herself. Perhaps because everyone in the family had gone out, there was only an old butler in the room who silently awaited an order like an ever-lingering shadow.

“Hello. My mother is the King’s concubine, moreover, her identity is also that of a commoner. I am sincerely grateful for His Majesty’s love, as he has sent a daughter of the Lafon family to be my personal maid.”

The boy said in a calm and mature manner, whilst he sat atop the black leather sofa, with a tone unfitting of what would be expected from an eight year old child. He had dark black hair, and deep blue eyes. His snow-white skin and beauty could easily be mistaken for the pretty face of a girl, and he also bore a slight resemblance to Uriel. *They do indeed possess the same blood within them* — Celestina couldn’t help thinking.

“I-I am Celestina Lafon.”

Celestina used both hands to pinch and lift her skirt, as she gave a curtsy with awkward motions to the boy.

“Then I’ll call you Celes.”

A cheerful smile emerged on the boy’s face, and disregarding Celestina’s wishes, he had given her a nickname of his own accord. Celestina felt that it was inconceivable. After Celestina wore an eye patch because she had been born with an abnormal left eye, she was only reluctantly accepted by society. In the

past, every time she met someone for the first time, everyone seemed to stare zealously at her eye patch. However, it seemed as if Oscar didn't hold any interest in her eye patch at all.

"What's wrong? Are you angry that I've made you a nickname on my own?"

"N-No! Just call me Celes!"

Celes returned to her senses, and replied quickly.

"Then, I suppose it's my turn to introduce myself. My name is—"

"Your name has already been made known to me. Oscar-sama."

Celes had perused the information that she had received beforehand, so she had already memorised all of Oscar Brailsford's basic information. —The child born from the King of the nation and a woman of common birth. If it was just this, it wouldn't be a surprisingly rare thing. The problem was that Oscar seemed to have something different in comparison to ordinary people. According to the information that was provided in the report, Oscar seemed to be a Breeder. Since the founding of the Lautreamont Knight Country that was in charge of the management of dragons, it was the first time for someone in the Chevron Kingdom to appear to have the qualifications of a Breeder. In other words, the embryo of a young dragon was currently hosted within Oscar's body. That was the reason why Zacharias III sent Celes to this place, her purpose was to monitor Oscar. He was afraid that sooner or later, Oscar would obtain the power of a dragon and attempt to steal the throne.

"Hmm. It seems as though you've done your homework on me. However, there is one thing that I have to make clear to you first."

"What is it...?"

Celes cautiously asked.

His Majesty the King's plan couldn't possibly be exposed at once, right...?

...She couldn't help but feel nervous, and she also kept her guard up.

"Listen to me carefully, Celes. I am the man who will become the future King of Chevron!"

"...What?"

Celes never imagined that Oscar would declare his ambitions to her almost as soon as she stepped through the door.

“To serve me means that you will accompany me on the path that lies ahead. Are you prepared for that?”

“Umm...even in the maid’s circle, I’m trash that can’t do anything, and I probably can’t help you accomplish anything.”

The edges of Celes’ mouth formed a frown as she lowered her head.

Someone like me is nothing more than a pawn to be used by the cunning Chevron King.

Carefully observing Oscar’s actions, and then providing a detailed report of them to the King — this was Celes’ mission.

Even if he asked me to work with him, I wouldn’t know what to do.

“Haha!”

As if to sweep away all of Celes’ melancholy, Oscar suddenly laughed.

“What a coincidence. You should also know that my ranking for the succession to the throne is one hundred and eighth. So you could say that I’m also useless trash. But I won’t give up on the throne just because of this. So you shouldn’t give up without even taking a single step — if you don’t even take that first step, then you’ve already decided that you can’t do it.”

After he finished speaking, Oscar held Celes’ hand.

“I’m counting on you, Celes.”

Since she became a servant, Celes had constantly been living without the warmth of human emotions. There was also a long period of time during which she didn’t see the mother who loved her. Perhaps it was because of this reason. Celes didn’t even know how to use words to express the mellow warmth that was brought forth by Oscar’s body heat. Oscar stared straight at the confused Celes, and an innocent smile appeared on his face.

“It seems like you and I are very similar, so we should get along well.”

“Y-Yes, but did you not hear about my left eye? My left eye is actually cursed,

and don't you feel...that I'm sickening?"

Although she had revealed the doubt that lay deep in her mind, Celes still felt confused. Oscar did not seem to be particularly wary of her, and was highly welcoming of Celes' arrival. If the calculations of Zacharias III were taken into consideration, then this was spot on.

But, why would I say that out loud?

Oscar wasn't aware of the inner conflict that was going on within Celes' mind, and extended his body forward



“Cursed? That sounds cool, doesn’t it!? Could I trouble you to tell me about your cursed left eye — which in other words is a magic eye!? Wow, this is a man’s romance!”

“I-Is that so?”

“To be honest I’m not very clear on it. But, don’t you think that boys will normally feel rather happy when they hear something like this?”

His way of describing it is really strange, Celes thought. Describing it in that manner was almost like looking at men from a third person’s point of view.

“Alright. If you tell me the secret of the magic eye, I’ll tell you an even bigger secret.”

“...Secret?”

“Since you’re going to be my servant, then I’ll have to tell you this secret. In contrast, once you know of this secret, I can no longer let you go free. If you have any trace of hesitation, then don’t listen any further, and turn around to leave immediately.”

Oscar’s expression was absolutely serious. It was difficult to imagine that an eight year old child could actually have such courage.

—Ah...perhaps this person will actually become the Chevron King in the future...

Celes took off her eye patch as such a premonition surfaced within her mind.

“Little Celestina ~A.S.B.1355.7~” is closed.

Chapter 1 - Eco's Bright Dragon Crystal

Part 1

The night that Ash and Eco defeated Rebecca. At the entrance to the boys' dormitory, Apollo House, Silvia completed her visitors' registration and then headed straight for the stairs. Cosette followed closely behind her. The destination of these two people was — the third floor that Ash's room was on.

"Princess-sama, you're so aggressive tonight. You're nonchalantly launching a night crawl^[1] from the main entrance."

When they had climbed halfway up the stairs, that was what Cosette said.

"N-Night crawl...?"

Silvia was so flustered that even her earlobes were dyed red and she stopped at the corner of the stairs.

"M-My personal maid should not speak so shamelessly! I just had to visit Ash for something! I-It's definitely not some kind of...night crawl!"

Silvia was ready to continue walking up, but Cosette remained rooted to the spot and did not move.

"...What is it, are you not coming up?"

"If I was there, I might be in the way of you two...it's better if I stay at the entrance to wait for you. Ufufu."

Seeing Cosette reveal an elaborate smile, Silvia seemed embarrassed.

"N-Not at all! Even without what you said, t-that...I would lack a sense of security...and what would I do if Eco just happened to be in the bath? Wouldn't that leave me alone with Ash?"

"Ara ara, isn't that what you want?"

Cosette revealed an expression that seemed to indicate surprise as she tilted

her head at Silvia.

“Y-You idiooot—!”

Silvia rushed up the stairs in one breath with watery eyes. She soon came to the end of the third floor corridor. Just when she had mentally prepared herself and was ready to knock on the door in front of her—

—*Dokun, dokun, dokun...*

She was so surprised by how intense her heartbeat was that she was at a loss. In the past, Silvia had visited Ash’s room more than just once. By logic, there was no reason for her to be nervous, but Silvia’s heart still continued to beat intensely.

“Princess-sama, what’s wrong?”

Having finally caught up, Cosette asked with puzzlement.

“...No, it’s nothing.”

Silvia feigned calmness. Just when she raised her hand and prepared to knock on the door again—

“Hey...please, Eco.”

“I don’t want to! It’s really embarrassing!”

The voices of the conversation in the room were heard across the door. Ash and Eco seemed to be in the midst of a quarrel.

“There must be something! I’ll help you as well.”

“There’s nothing you can do to help me with this kind of thing, okay!?”

“But if I’m just watching from the side, I don’t think I could bear it.”

“You don’t have to see it! Because it’s really, really embarrassing!”

Silvia blushed.

“Hey, Cosette. What are they doing right now?”

“Ufufu. We may not have come at the right time.”

Cosette appeared as though she was deeply enjoying this dubious situation.

“Hey, Eco. I’ve already been curious for a long time, just how is it so embarrassing? As far as I can see, other dragons don’t seem to feel embarrassed.”

“I-It’s because they have been tainted and domesticated by the stupid and ignorant humans, so that’s why they’ve forgotten about these important moral sentiments!”

“Eco, can you also forget about those moral sentiments then? Even just this once, because I really want to see it with my own eyes.”

“I can’t do something so savage...!”

Silvia’s entire face was flushed red and blood was rushing to her head.

“Did you hear that, Cosette? What does this ‘savage’ act mean!? I really misjudged you, Ash!”

With a burst of anger, Silvia suddenly kicked down the room door.

“You two! Have you no shame...huh?”

After seeing the scene in the room, Silvia froze as if she had been stunned. On one side was Eco, whose head was turned to face the other direction as she wrapped her arms around her herself while sitting on the bed. And on the other side was Ash, who was kneeling down on the floor, as if he was begging Eco. After letting down the fist that she had raised in the air, Silvia asked with a thorny tone

“W-What on earth were the two of you doing just now?”

Part 2

“Princess-sama!?”

Even though there was clearly only one hour left until the lights had to switched off, Silvia still barged into the room at this time of night, giving Ash quite a surprise. In any case, Silvia seemed to have a terrible misunderstanding, so Ash decided to explain to her in detail about the request that he made of Eco.

“You see, the last day of the Five Hundred Year’s Festival is the final match of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout, right? So I wanted to get a Dragon Crystal from Eco, just in case it’s needed at the time.”

Silvia straightened her gaze.

“Hold on, Ash. You’re not planning to use Oracles during the match, are you?”

Ash predicted that she would react in such a manner, and so he nonchalantly replied

“There’s no rule to prohibit their use, right?”

After Silvia folded her arms, she sighed somewhat in amazement.

“Certainly, there is no rule banning its use, but these so-called Oracles are basically just simplifications of Dragon Magic such that humans are able to use them. In a competition such as the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout where the standards are so high, I don’t think they’ll be very useful.”

Not only did this analysis conform to Silvia’s logical thought process, it was also very reasonable. If one wanted to use magic during a match, most would leave it to their Pals. But, Ash decided to use Silvia’s personality to attack at this time.

“Eco is the ‘Princess of Avalon’. Princess-sama, aren’t you curious about what kind of Bright Dragon Crystal she’ll produce? There might even be some kind of amazing result.”

“That is true, I get what you mean.”

At this point, Silvia finally accepted Ash's proposal.

"If that's the case, then please allow me to see this with you as well."

Sure enough, Silvia's curiosity and thirst for more knowledge was triggered.

"Hey! Silvia, how could you follow along as well!?"

While sitting on the bed, Eco could not help but cry out.

"Also, why did you show up in our room? You should be ashamed for coming over to the boys' dorm at this time!"

"T-That is because...!"

Having the tables turned on her by Eco, Silvia was momentarily speechless.

"Eco is right here. Princess-sama, was there something of importance?"

Ash tilted his head as he asked.

"U-Uh...I haven't congratulated you yet, so..."

Seemingly embarrassed, Silvia lowered her head as she replied with some hesitation. Her originally white cheeks were now dyed an adorable cherry colour, and her delicate appearance caused Ash's heart to beat a little faster. However, he could not figure out if there was any worthy reason for Silvia to come over to congratulate him at such a time.

"You said you wanted to congratulate me...but I can't think of anything."

Hearing Ash say that in a quiet voice, Silvia immediately reverted to her usual self.

"Of course, it's because you defeated President Rebecca in the preliminary round, and you've now qualified for the finals! That is the reason!"

Despite understanding where Silvia was coming from, Ash simply couldn't make himself feel happy about defeating Rebecca.

"To be honest...Rebecca-san didn't use her full power today, so I can't be happy it."

"Is that so?"

"In order to help me to defeat Oscar, she used the match to give me special

training. If not for that, I think I definitely would have lost. Rebecca-san is really a great person.”

“Indeed, I did also feel that that kind of fighting style was different from the President’s usual...”

Silvia folded her arms, seemingly trying to recall the match during the daytime. Just at that time—

“Somehow, it looked like she was enjoying it...”

A faint mosquito-like voice was heard from somewhere.

“Hii...!”

Silvia’s face suddenly turned pale. She probably thought it was the voice of a ghost. As usual, as soon as she encountered any supernatural phenomena, she would reveal an extremely timid side.

“W-Who is it!?”

Ash reflexively straightened his posture, and prepared himself for action.

“I also heard a voice...”

Eco also looked around the room, observing the situation. At that time, a ‘knock knock knock’ sound came from the window. While they hadn’t noticed, the glass window had been half-opened, and the night wind blew into the room.

“Lucca!?”

Ash, Eco and Silvia all cried out in unison. Indeed, the one who showed her face on the other side of the window was the girl riding the Maestro Gawain — Lucca Sarlinen. She was a second year student of the Unios Course, and was also the secretary of the Student Council. With silver hair that fluttered in the night wind as well as pointed ears that only the Eckbald people possessed, she was just like a fairy that appeared under the moonlight.

“Lucca, why are you here?”

When Ash asked, Lucca quietly whispered in response

“Tomorrow...I will fight against Silvia in the preliminary round...I don’t know

why...I suddenly wanted to see Ash's face...so I came here."

Upon seeing Lucca's delicate and charming expression, Ash's heartbeat intensified. Under the illumination of the moonlight, Lucca seemed to have an air of mystery about her.

"Hey, why are you acting so lovey-dovey!?"

"You're clearly being seduced!"

Seeing Eco and Silvia vent their accusations at him, Ash timidly shrunk backwards. After Lucca climbed in through the window, she directed her gaze towards Silvia.

"It's almost time for the curfew. But...why are you here...Silvia?"

Lucca spoke faintly, but her tone was sharp and thorny.

"I-I came here just to congratulate him for coming out on top!"

"...You don't need to lie. The real reason why you came here at night...should be the same as mine, right?"

Her amethyst-like eyes remained fixed on Silvia.

"Uh...!"

After a contest of stares between the two—

"Fine, yes! You're right! Tomorrow is an important preliminary round, so I'm also nervous...that's why I came to see Ash! Can't I do that?"

Silvia finally let loose, and revealed the true thoughts in her mind. Ever since she confessed to Ash, Silvia's actions towards Ash seemed to have become more and more daring.

"That's enough! I'm going to crush all of you!"

Eco suddenly stood on top of the bed in a threatening position. Both hands were on her hips while she intimidatingly stared at Silvia and Lucca, her bright red eyes filled with anger. Those brutal eyes were almost no different from that of a dragon's.

"No one gave you permission to push me off to the side! Ash belongs to me!"

Eco misspoke due to the sudden impulse, causing her face to become a shade of hot red, and it seemed almost as if steam would puff out of her head.

“Ah, that...it’s only as a knight, t-there’s no other meaning! Ash is the Avalon Knight, and I’m Avalon’s Holy Dragons’ Emperor Family’s Imperial Princess! T-That’s all it is!”

“Hmm. Based on what you just said, it seems the two of us have a fairly good chance. Also, as the Lautreamont family motto goes, one must strike while the iron is hot.”

Seeing as Eco wanted to avoid the topic, Silvia instead explained her words for their literal meaning, and then proudly nodded her head.

“I also...won’t lose.”

With a passionate look, Lucca clenched her fists in front of her chest.

“Nggh! That’s why I said you humans are so stupid and ignorant...!”

Eco’s anger elevated once again, and it seemed as though hot magma was going to erupt from her head.

“Listen okay? I kissed Ash!”

“Come on! You don’t need to—”

Ash hastily tried to stop them from continuing.

“So what, I’ve also kissed Ash! You also saw that, didn’t you, Eco?”

This time, a strange sense of competition was stirred up in Silvia.

“Ash...has kissed my important parts.”

Then, a shy Lucca also revealed an experience that aroused everyone’s attention.

“No no, what are you even talking about?”

“When we were cleaning Julius Hall, Ash put his head inside my skirt...”

After hearing that, Ash finally remembered. Although that was an unexpected accident, it was an indisputable fact that Lucca had sat over Ash’s face.

“According to the traditions of the Eckbald people, women can only allow the

groom to do such things to them...”

Upon hearing Lucca’s words, the pallor in Eco’s and Silvia’s faces instantly faded.

“E-Even I have not allowed Ash to touch there!”

“Don’t panic, Eco! When it comes to love, physical contact does not represent everything!”

“T-That’s right! How rare it is for Silvia to also agree!”

Eco suddenly appeared to be on the same wavelength as Silvia.

“Eco! The ‘rare’ is unnecessary!”

...Ash felt that this would never come to an end if it continued, so he decided to interrupt them.

“Okay okay, you three don’t need to argue any further. It’ll be time for the curfew in just another thirty minutes, and I would like to see Eco’s Bright Dragon Crystal before the lights go off...”

“If you didn’t say that, I would have forgotten as well.”

After Silvia cleared her throat with a dry cough, she steadied her emotions.

“...Eco’s Bright Dragon Crystal?”

Having joined in halfway, Lucca closely watched the interaction between Ash and Eco.

“Why did you mention this thing again...”

Eco turned her face to one side, and she sighed because the topic of conversation had once again returned to this. Having finally gotten the three girls to halt their war of words, Ash suddenly directed his gaze towards Lucca. After all, the Eckbald people were a race that was good at dealing with Dragons. So perhaps she knew some way to persuade the resistant Eco, and perhaps even convince Eco to produce a Bright Dragon Crystal.

“Hey, Lucca. Does the Eckbald village have a method to encourage Dragons to produce Bright Dragon Crystals?”

“...Yes.”

Lucca answered without any hesitation.

“Eh, really?”

Instead, it was Ash who felt surprised despite being the one who asked. As if she had suddenly thought of something, Lucca undid the ribbon on her chest. She then took off her coat without any further hesitation. One by one, her clothing fell to the floor, forming a circle around her small feet.

“Wait! Why are you taking your clothes off!?”

Ash’s heart almost jumped out of his chest. Lucca was currently in a semi-naked state. The beauty of her delicate body was like an angel’s, and it felt like a sin to even look at it directly.

“Hey, Ash! Stop staring!”

After Silvia jumped in front of Lucca, she reprimanded Lucca who was behind her.

“And Lucca, you’re also in the wrong! To take off your clothes without warning in front of a boy, do you have no shame!?”

“Because...if you want a Dragon to produce a lively Bright Dragon Crystal...you can only rely on intimate skin contact.”

While this ‘lively Bright Dragon Crystal’ sounded completely puzzling, perhaps it was a unique description that the Eckbald people used. Because this description was similar to a ‘lively baby’, Ash couldn’t help but feel embarrassed. Lucca suddenly made Eco her target.

“Eco also needs to take her clothes off.”

“Hah? What are you saying!?”

Although Eco previously walked around nude without a care, she had slowly attained the sense of embarrassment that ordinary people had. Upon hearing Lucca’s request, she subconsciously lost her temper.

“What kind of joke is this!? Undressing in front of others is so embarrassing — ahmm!”

Eco was interrupted halfway through her sentence. In contrast to her

appearance, Lucca had moved her body with agility and began to nibble on the horn atop Eco's head.

"Ah...you can't bite there...!"

In an instant, Eco's entire body became flaccid, and she collapsed into Lucca's arms. Ash had almost forgotten that it was a Dragon's weakness. As soon as that part was lightly nibbled on, their entire bodies would become limp and weak.

"Y-You can't...n-not there...!"

Eco was stripped of her clothes without any resistance. As expected of an Eckbald person that was good at dealing with Dragons, Lucca's actions seemed skilful, and the people watching could only stare dumbfounded. So long as their target was a Dragon, even if their outward appearance was that of a human girl, it didn't seem to make any difference. Eco's completely limp and bare body was placed onto the bed. Her skin was white and crystal clear, as if it was emitting a sacred glow.

"Cover Ash's eyes! Now!"

Silvia sternly gave an order to Cosette, who had been waiting by the door.

"Certainly, Princess-sama."

In an instant, Ash was dragged away by a vigorous force from behind, while his body was turned around in the process. Followed by a 'poof!' sound, there seemed to be something incredibly soft wrapped around his cheeks. A floral scent entered his nostrils.

"Mufu! Moffumm...!"

Because his mouth had been blocked, Ash was unable to speak properly. After struggling for a moment, Ash finally realised — that his face was currently buried in between Cosette's well-endowed bosom. Through her maid uniform, he could feel Cosette's body warmth and the full sensation of her body.

—She usually acts like an approachable elder sister, so I didn't particularly pay attention...I never imagined that Cosette was so immensely large...and so incredibly soft was well...

While thinking about such things, Ash's body gradually began to grow hot.

"Hey, Cosette! I only told you to cover his eyes! I didn't tell you to use such a method!"

The sound of Silvia's protest came from behind Ash.

"Calm down, Princess-sama. This is a maid's welfare."

"It has nothing to do with being a maid!"

"So you don't care if you don't see the moment when Eco produces the Bright Dragon Crystal, Princess-sama?"

"Well, that's true. I can't miss such a precious moment!"

Silvia's presence seemed to dissipate. She probably moved over to the bedside.

"F-Fu..."

Soon after, the sound of Eco's seductive breathing entered Ash's ears. He was truly curious about just what kind of thing was happening on top of that bed. Because Cosette was tightly holding him down, Ash was unable to see anything.

"Eco's hair is so soft..."

"Wah! If you stroke it like that...!"

The atmosphere was becoming stranger by the second.

"Lucca-sama and Eco are cuddling together like puppies."

Perhaps out of generosity, or simply for amusement, Cosette began to describe the current situation into Ash's ears.

"Ara ara, now Lucca-sama is rubbing an Ansal fragrance onto Eco's back. There's a sweet scent wafting around in the room."

Although this was what Cosette described, Ash could only smell the fragrance of Cosette's body.

"Eco, are you still nervous? Let yourself loosen up a little more..."

Lucca's quiet whispers could be heard.

"...Really...embarrassing...please, stop already..."

Although Eco seemed to be slowly becoming intoxicated by the fragrance of the Ansal, she still seemed to be rational. As if to persuade Eco to surrender, Lucca then continued to say

“It’s okay. You just need to trust me...you’ll be sure to produce a healthy crystal.”

“I-I don’t want to...give birth to that kind of thing.....”

“Is it comfortable here?”

“Ahmm...!”

It was not known what Lucca did, but Eco cried out even louder. The next moment, Ash sensed that the entire room was bathed in a warm light.

“—Please take a look, Ash-sama.”

After Cosette said so with a whisper, she loosened the grip of her arms around him.

“Is it alright for me to look now?”

With slight hesitation, Ash lifted his head from Cosette’s bosom.

“Princess-sama’s attention is currently focused solely on Eco at the moment. She won’t be distracted by anything else.”

“Thank you, Cosette.”

Ash turned his head, and looked over his shoulder towards the bed. And then he took a deep breath. Eco’s body was afloat in mid-air, hovering at a distance of about five centimetres above the bed. Her nude body was emitting a pink glow. Her body was surrounded by flashing objects that appeared to resemble stars. The luminosity was so intense that it was almost difficult to keep one’s eyes open. But Ash did not close his eyes, he was still closely observing the phenomenon that was occurring on Eco’s body. Those sparkling stars were slowly converging towards Eco’s chest, and they finally fused into a large crystal.

“Oh, how beautiful...!”

It was like a pink diamond, a Bright Dragon Crystal that seemed to emit a sense of solemnity. The radiance finally dimmed, and Eco's floating nude body 'pon' fell back onto the bed. Although she appeared to have just barely remained conscious, her entire body was hot, and her skin had become red.

"Ha, ha..."

Eco lay on the bed with panting breaths. It was a seductive appearance that captivated Ash for a moment, and even his throat twitched due to his nervousness.

"So this is a Bright Dragon Crystal produced by the daughter of Avalon..."

Silvia leaned over, and picked up the crystal that Eco had produced.

"A pink crystal is rather unusual. What beauty..."

By reason, a Bright Dragon Crystal should have become a commonplace thing for a princess of the Knight Country's royal family, but Silvia seemed deeply impressed by it.

"I can feel...extremely powerful magic."

Even Lucca, who rarely showed such emotions, appeared to be fascinated by it. This was the first Bright Dragon Crystal that Eco had given birth to. As for exactly what kind of effect was embedded inside, Ash was still unable to envision.

"The Crystal of Avalon *A.S.B.1365.10*" is closed.

Chapter 2 - Ice Blue Princess Vs Elfin Dancer

Part 1

It was now the next morning. The hands of the silver pocket watch which was proof of a Dragonar indicated that the time was eight o'clock. In just two more hours, the second day of the Five Hundred Years Festival would begin. As a member of the Student Council, one could not oversleep on such a grand occasion. Having changed into his uniform, Ash flung open the curtains with one sweep, and sunlight spilled into the room. Today was also a bright sunny day... upon thinking this; it was also noticeable that grey clouds had gathered in the direction of the arena. It was worrisome whether or not the weather would take a turn for the worse, but the current priority was to wake Eco up.

"Eco, it's time to get up."

After Ash sat down on the edge of the bed, he lightly shook Eco's shoulders.

"Mmm.....kiss me....."

"Eh!?"

Ash was greatly surprised, and suspected that it must have been himself that had misheard. What did she just say?

"Kiss.....if you do.....I'll wake up....."

"What are you talking about!?"

Eco's sudden request caused Ash to feel incredibly embarrassed. Could it simply be the case that she was still half-asleep? Or perhaps she was currently having a dream that involved kissing. If that was the case, Ash was still curious about exactly what she was dreaming about... Bathed in the morning light that penetrated through the window, her glowing pink hair was as lustrous as a star. Her skin was clear and white, while her cheeks were round and tender. Drawn-out around the periphery of her beautiful eyes were long eyelashes. Her lips that spoke dreamy sentences was like a rosebud. Under the cover of her thin

silk clothing, her body still had a tender atmosphere, and it was possible to vaguely see the colour of her skin. Needless to say, Ash's heartbeat accelerated as if it could no longer be restrained.

"I-If I kiss you, will you really get out of bed obediently?"

"Mmm, I'll get up..."

After Ash prepared himself mentally, he placed both his hands on top of Eco's shoulders.

"Eco..."

Ash called out Eco's name in a dreamlike manner. Ash called to her with the name that he had personally given her, the name for which there was no substitute — after he closed his eyes, he slowly moved his lips closer to Eco's. His lips and hers gently overlapped with each other. Through their affixed lips, feelings of affection were raised within him. After a while, Ash slowly moved his head away. A feeling of ecstasy welled up at the back of his head, after which he opened his eyes. As soon as he opened his eyes, he stared straight at Eco. Ruby-like eyes stared right back into Ash's face.

"Kya~~~~~!"

In a panic, Eco let out a shrill cry and suddenly jumped up. Both of her cheeks were bright red, and even her ears and the nape of her neck had become a shade of bright red while her eyes had become watery. Probably because she was embarrassed to look at Ash face-to-face, she turned her back to him and hugged a stuffed animal tightly.

"Y-You just...!"

"Eco? I thought you weren't awake yet!"

"I didn't think that...you would really do it."

"Eh? So you were deliberately trying to test me!?"

"Because we haven't kissed for a long time! Thinking about the last person who kissed Ash being Silvia...I couldn't stand it anymore!"

Perhaps because of the increase in temperature, the current Eco looked extraordinarily charming, causing Ash to blush and his heartbeat to hasten.

“But, isn’t kissing a very valuable thing? Even if I am a dragon, I know that much. Because when I kiss Ash, I have this kind of warm feeling in my heart...”

Tears seemed to be welling up in Eco’s eyes.

“To begin with, I only meant it half-seriously to tempt you, but you actually kissed...I can’t believe it...”

Eco was supposed to be angry, but not even the slightest trace of anger could be felt from her words. While she blamed Ash verbally, she felt joy on the inside — even Ash could feel this atmosphere.

“Ah, let’s hurry and get breakfast!”

Because the atmosphere was so awkward, Ash unconsciously raised his voice.

“Y-Yes, that’s right! A dragon must have five meals a day!”

As if infected by Ash, Eco also raised the volume of her voice.

Part 2

—At nine forty five in the morning.

In the arena that had just been repaired overnight, the second preliminary match of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout was about to begin. Although this match was originally scheduled for yesterday, the arena had taken damage and was badly destroyed as a result of Rebecca's magic attacks, so it had to be delayed by one day. Although Ash had a lot of behind-the-scenes work to busy himself with as a member of the Student Council, Ash did not want to miss the match as the winner of this match would be an opponent in the finals.

"I'm sorry Jessica, please help me! I really want to watch this match!"

In the office of the arena, Ash put his hands together in front of Jessica to ask for help. Rebecca was currently hospitalised. Silvia and Lucca were the combatants who were just about to begin in this second match. Max and Oscar were in the combatants' lounge, preparing for the third match. If Ash and Eco left their working positions to watch the battle, the remaining Student Council member — Jessica was the only member of the Dragon Riding Festival Committee left. Jessica, who was busy preparing documents, lifted her face with a wry smile.

"I don't mind. I don't want to see Ash-sama losing to the Vice-President either."

"Thank you, Jessica!"

"However, it might be a bit difficult to say it...but there is a favour that I want from Ash-sama."

Jessica's cheeks faintly reddened, and she placed both hands in front of her chest as though she was praying. Although she was currently wearing her uniform, Ash was still attracted to the luscious curves of Jessica's body, and his throat twitched as he swallowed. He simply felt that her chest seemed to have grown even larger after the long summer vacation.

"I-If it's something that I can do, then you can tell me...but you can't mention

a request to have children, okay?”

Reminded of Jessica’s usual bold words and deeds, Ash pre-emptively added a condition.

“Ara, I can’t?”

Yet, as though this was unexpected, Jessica tilted her head in thought.

“It was impossible from the beginning! It’s not unexpected at all!”

While Ash retorted, Eco emitted a murderous intent ‘Go go go go go...’ from behind him.

“Hmm~...”

Eco’s stare was enough to make him uncomfortable. It felt like a thorn pressed against his back, causing Ash to become anxious. At that time, Jessica’s expression suddenly brightened.

“Ash-sama, no need to worry, I have already given up on the throne of the legal wife. As long as I can satisfy Ash-sama, even if I’m the second or third wife, I don’t mind! I don’t mind even if I’m the hundredth wife!”

“I’m not the King of Chevron! I’m not that perverted!”

While Ash revealed an embarrassed reaction, Eco continued to ‘Go go go go go...’ release an ominous black aura.

“Hmmmm~.....”

Eco’s gaze continued to become colder, and it was directed straight at Ash’s back. Having said that, she didn’t lose her temper on the spot, so this could be considered proof that Eco had become slightly more mature. At this time, loud cheers erupted from the arena. Based on that, it seemed that Silvia and Lucca had entered the ring to appear before the audience. In any case, there was no time right now to wait for Jessica’s request.

“I’m sorry, Jessica! I’ll make it up to you later!”

After saying this, Ash took Eco with him as he left the office.

Part 3

Although it was only a preliminary match, the <Ice Blue Princess> versus <Elfin Dancer> combination was received by a round of cheers. It was wildly popular with the audience. It was unfortunate that grey clouds hung over the sky above the arena and sunlight was scarce, but the incredibly lively atmosphere seemed to sweep away all of the gloom in the weather. In particular, there was an all-blue cheer squad for Silvia, as well as a troupe of Ecbald people who had come all the way to Ansarivan to cheer for Lucca; these two groups in the audience were the most fanatical, and simply looking at them was enough to induce a sense of fear. Ash held Eco's hand as they walked towards seats for general admission. However, the ordinary seats seemed as though they were almost completely occupied. As far as they could see, there were simply people, people and people everywhere — the audience filled the entire arena like an ocean. The number of standing audience members also continued to increase.

"This is troublesome..."

It seemed as though they would have to stand in order to watch. Just as Ash gave up on finding a seat—

"Ash-sama, over here."

Someone in the audience stand suddenly stood up. Upon taking a closer look, it was actually Cosette. She smiled and waved, her palace-styled maid outfit was especially conspicuous on this occasion. It seemed as though she had come to help reserve seats for Ash and Eco.

"Thank you so much, Cosette-san!"

Ash rushed forward as if he had found an oasis within a desert. Positioned in the front most row, it had an excellent view and it was simply perfect.

"As expected of Cosette, you're as sharp as always!"

Eco sat down in the seat directly next to Cosette.

"Come on Eco, shouldn't you thank Cosette-san?"

While Ash corrected Eco's rudeness, he also sat down. After breathing a sigh of relief—

“—Hey, Ash.”

Ash suddenly heard someone call his name out. Out of surprise, he turned towards the seat just opposite Eco's seat — there was a girl who had tied up her red hair, splitting the left and right sides. The mini-dress that she wore had many laces and frills. The girl smiled at him audaciously. Her gorgeous dress made her look like a noble lady of Chevron aristocracy. The girl was wearing a pair of large sunglasses to conceal her appearance.

“Who is she...?”

Such a thought momentarily flashed across his mind, but Ash immediately recognised her identity.

“No way, it's Rebecca-san, right!?”

“Your voice is too loud. After all, I'm still supposed to be in the hospital.”

Rebecca extended her index finger and gently placed it over Ash's lips to silence him. At this moment, a particular scene appeared in Ash's mind. It was yesterday evening when — Ash had gone to the hospital to visit Rebecca who had been sent there. Rebecca was livelier than he had imagined, and she had even taken Ash to the park. After the two of them spoke for a while there, Rebecca returned to the hospital — but when they parted, she kissed Ash's cheek. As soon as he thought about the sensation of her lips, Ash's entire body became hot.

“Uh...I'm quite surprised. You seem like a completely different person...”

Rebecca revealed a devilish smile.

“If I don't disguise myself, journalists would swarm towards me like ants if I was to be seen. And I personally don't dislike elegant clothing; after all, the Randall family is an aristocratic one.”

It felt as though he had inadvertently learned about an unexpected side to the <Scarlet Empress>, causing Ash to feel surprised yet again.

“—Now, the second preliminary match of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout is

about to begin!”

At that time, the physical education teacher who was also acting as the master of ceremonies and referee made an announcement with a loud voice. That voice echoed throughout through the loudspeakers of the entire arena using magic.

“Finally huh...”

As Ash nervously gulped, the bell to declare the beginning of the match rang out. Both Lancelot and Gawain spread their wings to fly up at the same time—.

Part 4

The aerial battle between the two Maestros was impressive, and the deafening support from the crowd had become white-hot.

“Both of them aren’t too bad!”

Eco also looked up at the sky with excitement. Her original intention of scouting out the enemy was pushed to the back of her mind, and she had now become an audience member who was purely enjoying the match.

“.....”

In contrast, Ash was feeling incredibly nervous. As he watched both Silvia and Lucca, they just didn’t look like they were fighting with a ‘competitive’ mentality. Although this was a traditional contest of the Knight Country, it felt as though those two were overly passionate. Just what were the two of them doing?

“...Umm, Rebecca-san, those two seem to be enveloped in a dangerous aura. Don’t you feel as though they’re really going all out to fight?”

“Oh, how could you ask that question? You really are such a sinful man...”

After Rebecca glanced at Ash behind her sunglasses, she sighed with amazement.

“What do you mean?”

“Have you forgotten what the winner will receive as a prize?”

“Ah...I almost forgot that there was such an arrangement.”

Ash couldn’t help but allow his gaze to drift off into the distance. Silvia had made a declaration

If I am victorious, I want to be engaged to Ash—

Lucca’s request didn’t differ too much, since she hoped to hold a ‘sacred wedding’ with Ash.

“So that’s why the two of them are fighting so hard...”

After finding out that the culprit was none other than himself, Ash couldn't stop himself from worrying.

"Fufu. It must be hard being a lady-killer."

As Rebecca giggled, the audience suddenly let out a burst of cheers. Lancelot's Crimson Ex-Breath shattered Gawain's magic barrier.

—Dooooooooooooon!

The aftermath of the impact caused Gawain to lose balance. It then fell straight down. Lucca's cheering squad let out a sad wail, but Gawain released magical energy just before it reached the ground to barely make a safe landing. It also appeared as though Lucca was still full of fighting spirit. However, it seemed as though that sudden emergency landing from the air had exhausted most of Gawain's magical energy.

"It looks like Princess-sama will win this match. Even if Lucca is a genius, she is still just a student of the Unios course, and the gap in their experience can't be bridged so simply..."

"Are you sure about that?"

Rebecca's tone of voice suddenly became serious.

"Why do you say that?"

"It looks like Lucca still has a trump card."

"Do you mean the Dragon Riding Dance? But that move shouldn't be suitable for use in a one-on-one battle. And if there is interference from an opponent while she's in mid-air drawing magic patterns, then wouldn't it be over?"

"You're too naïve, Ash."

Rebecca answered with that, and for some reason, she then looked up at the sky above the arena.

"There's a lot of cloud cover today. The other side of the sky is certainly clear, only the sky above the arena is covered by clouds; it's almost as if someone did that on purpose..."

Rebecca spoke solemnly, while Ash could only stare in puzzlement.

Part 5

“—Good, Gawain’s magical energy will soon be exhausted. The outcome has been decided.”

After Silvia nodded with satisfaction, she tugged on the reins. After Lancelot let loose a roar whilst maintaining a height of fifty metres above the ground, it then coolly descended from the sky. As soon as Lancelot landed on the ground, Silvia immediately warned Lucca

“Get down from Gawain’s back, Lucca. There’s no point in continuing to fight.”

Lucca’s face remained expressionless, and she simply stared back at Silvia.

“I’ll admit that you’re very talented, but the gap in our experience is as clear as day. The current you is no match for me and Lancelot.”

However, Lucca slowly shook her head.

“The knights of Ecbald may only die on the backs of their Pal in battle...this is our rule.”

Different from usual, Lucca was exuding an incredible sense of courage. Silvia was almost pushed back by her imposing manner. The usual Lucca was quiet and reticent, being elusive about her true feelings. But her current words and actions allowed Silvia to fully understand that her feelings towards Ash were sincere.

“Are you willing to gamble your life in order to win this match!?”

“...Silvia, are you not risking your own life? Are your feelings towards Ash so superficial?”

In an instant, blood rushed straight to Silvia’s head.

“Nonsense! When it comes to dedication towards Ash, I definitely won’t lose to anyone!”

“Is that so...then I’m relieved.”

“Relieved?”

“I don’t have to worry...when I go all out.”

All of a sudden, Lancelot’s limbs froze and lost their ability to move. Without any obvious preparations being made, Gawain had used Azul Ex-Blizzard. Lancelot’s front and hind legs had become frozen in ice. Silvia felt vexed that she had carelessly underestimated the enemy. Lancelot cried out in pain.

“Kuh! Calm down, Lancelot! This weak ice magic cannot—”

Taking advantage of Silvia’s present state, Lucca raised her right arm over her head.

“Dragon Riding Dance — Third Dance, Scorching Meteor!”

“...What did you say!?”

Silvia was shocked. How was she able to omit the dance preparations and use magic directly? Ignoring Silvia’s question, holy rays of light shot down from the clouds above the arena. The clouds that enveloped the sky above the arena gradually disappeared — as if their goal had been accomplished. Then, what appeared in the sky behind the clouds was an enormous magic circle — it was a <Seikoku> pattern bearing resemblance to a dragon’s head.

“Wha...when was this...!”

Silvia shouted out with a pale expression.

“I finished it secretly during the night...”



After Lucca answered faintly, she brought down the arm that she had raised up high. Silvia's vision was dyed a vast expanse of white by a meteor shower that descended upon her.

Part 6

The stream of meteors that rained down from the white sky — they were magic rays of the holy attribute. The magical rays altered their trajectory in mid-air, and they all flew towards Silvia and Lancelot.

“What incredible magic...!”

Ash soon realised that the Third Dragon Riding Dance was homing-type offensive magic. Lucca and Gawain were probably able to remain in the arena without the need to evade because they were confident that they would not be hit. Lancelot’s four limb’s had been sealed with ice magic. If it had a little more time, it might have been able to free itself, but the harsh attack was already upon them.

—Dooooooooooooooooooooon!

Powerful flashes of light and deafening explosions rippled in every direction.

“Princess-sama...is she okay?”

Just as Ash murmured, he recalled a hazy memory. When Lucca came to his room yesterday evening — Lucca had climbed into his room through the window with the assistance of Gawain. Ash thought that she had simply come to see him, but that was not actually the case. Presumably, she had just completed a large project. As for the clouds that covered the enormous magic pattern for the whole night, that was likely to be something that Gawain’s magic produced. Even though Ash had been deceived and was surprised for a moment, Rebecca had already realised that this was a trick created with illusion magic. The entire arena had gone silent. Every member of the audience was breathless, as they worried for the safety of Silvia and Lancelot. After a while, the dazzling light finally receded.

“Lancelot...!”

Ash unconsciously murmured. Lancelot had produced several layers of high-level defensive hexagonal magic barriers, and was enduring the pain caused by its injuries. Surrounded by numerous hexagonal shields, it emitted a bright glow

underneath the radiance of the sun. However, there were a few magical rays that had pierced through its shields, injuring Lancelot's body. Blood oozed out from Lancelot's sides, and some of its fur had also been charred. But the main problem was Silvia. Lancelot's saddle was empty, and Silvia was nowhere to be seen.

"Princess-sama! Where did Princess-sama go!?"

"Calm down, Ash. Isn't Silvia over there?"

Ash hurriedly looked towards where Rebecca was pointing. Ash was speechless. Silvia's Dragsuit was severely burned, and she was half-naked. But she was still proudly standing atop Gawain's back — immediately behind Lucca.

"Lancelot used teleportation magic!?"

Rebecca seemed to answer Ash's question with satisfaction

"Correct answer, Ash. Just in the nick of time, Lancelot gave up on undoing the ice magic, and erected hexagonal shields. But this was not enough to completely nullify Lucca's attack, so Lancelot took its master's safety into account, and sent Silvia away without any hesitation. According to the rules, falling from the back of a dragon counts as a loss, but Silvia didn't fall from Lancelot's body, and this current situation can only be regarded as jumping onto Gawain's back."

"So at present, it means that Princess-sama is still riding on a dragon...she hasn't lost yet!"

When Ash understood this fact, Silvia took action. She lightly pushed Lucca's back once.

"Eh...?"

With no resistance whatsoever, Lucca fell from the saddle, and landed with her bottom on the ground. Before Gawain could notice, Silvia quickly jumped down from its back. It was a taboo for dragons to allow anyone other than their own master to ride on their back. If Silvia immersed herself in the moment of victory and continued to stand on top of Gawain's back, then it would lead to an unpredictable result. Even though this was valid according to the rules, Gawain would probably become hostile towards Silvia. Ash had tried to

forcefully mount Gawain in the past, causing himself to be seriously injured.

“Hmm, a calm judgement. Silvia has also grown a lot.”

After Rebecca expressed her admiration, a thunderous wave of cheers erupted from the arena. The loud voice of the referee’s verdict echoed across the sky.

“That was the second preliminary match of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout! The winner is Her Royal Highness Silvia Lautreamont!”

“The Second Heat! *A.S.B.1365.10*” is closed.

Chapter 3 - The Night Before the Finale, The Calm Before the Storm

Part 1

In the third match of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout, Oscar easily defeated Max with her overwhelming strength and progressed into the finals. The Five Hundred Years Festival had progressed smoothly, and it was now the evening of the fourth day. The streets of the Academy City Ansarivan were no different than usual, and they were bustling with a lively atmosphere. Even at night, the city was lit-up as if it was a city that never slept. For an urban area of the Knight Country that was known to be conservative, one could say that this was unusual. The Chevron Kingdom's magic ship, the , Claíomh Solais^[2] was parked outside the city walls. Zacharias III had come to visit Ansarivan for the final day of the Five Hundred Years Festival — this news had spread throughout the streets in the blink of an eye. After the incident in which the capital, Fontaine City, had been attacked by an enormous dragon, Zacharias III blamed the Paladin of the Knight Country, Oswald, causing relations between the two nations to become tense. During this precarious international situation, Zacharias III decided to personally visit the Five Hundred Years Festival, so it was naturally understandable that the citizens of the Knight Country felt relieved. It seemed as though it would still be a while until the lights in the city would fade back to their usual calmness.

Part 2

Inside the magic ship Claíomh Solais — the audience room.

Zacharias III appeared calm while on the throne. Although his hair was already white, his beard was a shade of silver, and he looked like an old man who could pass away at any time, his eyes were still full of spirit, showing his obsession with life. Aside from the Chevron Royal Family and the proud Royal Guard in the room, there were also various foreign ministers and other important government officials. In addition, the queen consorts ranked from one to twenty had been allowed to attend. They were the Queen Group that people spoke of. The Queen Group was an idol-like existence in the Chevron Kingdom. The thing that amazed people was the fact that the ranking of the Queen Group was decided by a national vote by the citizens. The top twenty ranked queens were allowed to attend various types of formalities. With this kind of system, it was said that the queens ranked twenty-first and below never once ceased their fierce struggle behind the scenes as they competed for a more prominent ranking.... Amidst this scene that seemed to be choking with the scent of perfume, there was a group that was particularly unexpected. They were the Knight Country's First Princess Veronica Lautreamont and her personal guard. Veronica's personal guard was composed of seven people. Including Glenn McGuire as the captain of her personal guard, all of the members were first-class Dragonars. Why did Zacharias III commission Veronica to act as an escort — the noble kneeling down in front of the King plainly understood the reason. Dressed in formal attire, Oscar Brailsford's attitude was still just as elegant as usual while he spoke words of greeting according to the script.

"I wish Your Majesty absolute safety and good—"

The elderly king answered with a dull expression

"You can spare me from these fake greetings. Your brazen attitude is like Uriel's, and it's worse than ever."

"You flatter me. Compared to that older brother, I'm just an ordinary person."

Zacharias III suddenly laughed.

“The master of the Maestro Tristan dares to call himself an ordinary person? It seems you still do not understand the reason why I commissioned Princess Veronica as an escort.”

“Your Majesty, you have no need for worry. If those were my intentions, I certainly could summon Tristan over, and it would indeed be possible to flatten you and the throne, Your Majesty.”

Every corner of the room suddenly burst into uproar. There were even members of the Royal Guard who reached out to place their hands on the hilt of their swords. Even so, Oscar made a declaration with an unyielding tone

“But I am not such a despicable person. To succeed the throne in a just and dignified manner so as not to shame the Chevron Royal Family’s name — that is my dream.”

“Hmph. I didn’t call you here to listen to such false and unrealistic platitudes.”

“Then, for what reason Your Majesty?”

“...I am old. I reminisce of my youth when I rode my favourite horse, and of the Royal Family’s sword Tír na nÓg^[3] that has been handed down from generation to generation. I hope to be able to return to a form where I can freely wield that treasured sword again.”

After Zacharias III murmured with sorrow, his eyes drifted to the side of the throne. There was a gigantic sword in its scabbard that stood upon a dedicated pedestal.

—One day, that sword will also belong to me...!

Zacharias III coldly said to Oscar who had quietly made that strong determination

“For that reason, I need the blood of the Avalon Royal Family. Bring the young dragon Eco to see me as soon as possible. For a student of Dragonar Academy like you, this should be an easy task.”

This moment had finally arrived...Oscar felt nervous.

“The deadline is tomorrow evening — before I leave Ansarivan.”

In that instant, a multitude of things emerged in Oscar's mind. A well-known figure such as Zacharias III had actually come to a small place like Ansarivan — even if the 'Ansarivan Five Hundred Years Festival' was supposed to be a grand festival, the definition of 'grand' was only relative to the size of the Knight Country. In the eyes of the Chevron King, this was nothing more than a small festival that was held by a neighbouring regional city. The real reason why the King of Chevron had come to Ansarivan was not to watch the dragon riding competition, but for Eco's blood—

—Those who drink the blood of the Avalon Royal Family will gain eternal life and eternal youth.

It was an ancient legend that circulated around the continent. Unfortunately, Oscar's mind was much more level-headed than the old King's, and he scoffed at the concept of immortality and eternal youth. However, Oscar also clearly understood that trying to say anything else to this old King would simply be a waste of time and effort.

"As you wish."

After a moment of silence, Oscar lowered his head deeply.

Part 3

“You’re late, Oscar.”

Celes greeted Oscar who had just left the audience room.

“Sorry for making you wait.”

“...Let’s hurry up and return. There’s no point in us staying on this tattered and rotten ship.”

Celes was strangely fidgety, and her expression seemed impatient. *I haven’t seen Celes like this in a long time* — Oscar thought. When she had just arrived at the Brailsford family, Celes was a weak and slender girl. After taking care of Oscar’s daily life for a while, her temper had somehow grown...

“To actually say that the Chevron Royal Family’s magic ship is a rotten boat, as expected of Celes. I don’t mind though, because this ship will become mine sooner or later.”

“.....”

Celes seemed to sink into deep thought, and she didn’t say anything.

“Look at your unhappy face. Did the people from the Lafon family say something?”

This was the inside of the magic ship Claíomh Solais for the Royal Family, so it was only natural that most of the servants on board the ship were from the Lafon family. Celes had become an adopted daughter of the Lafon family when she was young, but she was unable to assimilate into that environment, so she was left out. So for Celes, staying here made her uncomfortable, and that was understandable. Oscar placed her hand on top of Celes’ head, and smiled at her.

“...You’re right. It’s best that we leave this ship sooner. Let’s go, Celes.”

Celes returned a fierce look and swiftly threw off Oscar’s hand.

“D-Don’t treat me like a child!”

And then with an expression filled with anger, she began to storm off.

“Oh my, is she embarrassed?”

After Oscar smiled playfully, she chased after Celes.

Part 4

That night, the members of the Student Council gathered in the student restaurant <La Tene> to hold a meeting.

“Mmm~! <La Tene>’s meat dishes are truly quite tasty! Seconds!”

Eco only thought of enjoying the ‘Grilled Lamb’ while the contents of the meeting’s discussion simply went in her left ear and out her right ear. She impatiently turned to the waitress Anya to order more.

“C-Certainly...!”

Anya was constantly summoned by Eco, but it seemed as though she had already gotten quite used to her attire as a waitress. She also gave off the impression that a maid outfit was the most suitable appearance for her.

“Don’t you think you’re working Anya too hard?”

Ash smiled wryly as he reprimanded Eco.

“This is my job, so it doesn’t matter...ah, it would be better to say that guests should feel free to request anything.”

“Thank you, Anya. But we are similar in age, so you don’t have to be so respectful to us. It’s alright to be a little more relaxed when you speak to us, okay?”

“I-Is that so...?”

“I wouldn’t mind you calling us by our names directly either.”

“Then, can I call you Ash?”

“Yeah, just like that.”

After Ash replied with a smile, Anya looked down seemingly embarrassed, and she twisted about slightly. That brave warrior girl had now donned a maid outfit, and displayed a shy side. There were also the fan-promotions from the re-opening — Anya was still wearing the cat ears and tail accessories. They seemed to be more popular than expected, so the manager ordered an

extension of the special service promotion. It just seemed as though Anya herself didn't have much of a say in it. Ash couldn't help but fall into a daze as he stared at Anya.

~~~~~“Mmm~!”~~~~~

At some point—

Eco, Silvia, Lucca and Jessica all began to look at Ash with sharp gazes. Even the sound of their dissatisfaction was no less than to be expected from four people.

“T-Then I'll get back to work!”

Most likely because she was intimidated by the presence of the girls, Anya hurriedly hid back into the kitchen.

“Ah, I haven't ordered yet...!”

Ash's call did not make it out, and emptiness echoed back in mid-air.

“Ufufu. Ash-sama certainly is not easy.”

Standing behind Silvia's seat, Cosette giggled happily.

“—Speaking of which, after eating so much with such a petite body, I'm curious as to where all the food actually goes?”

Seeing Eco constantly eat and drink, the academy principal Mirabel murmured in amazement. Mirabel rarely engaged in school activities normally, but she had made a rare appearance tonight.

“From a physical point of view, it seems quite impossible...”

“I-It's only natural that common sense cannot explain it, aneue<sup>[4]</sup>. Moreover, Eco is a dragon. She must have at least five meals a day...”

The person who timidly responded to Mirabel was Silvia. She seemed rather respectful towards her cold and collected older sister, and her attitude was as polite as it would have been to an outsider.

“Principal, thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to attend today.”





Even if it was Mirabel, Rebecca still upheld a generous attitude as she spoke. Her injuries had already healed so she was discharged from hospital, and she returned to her full capacity as the president of the Student Council. In contrast to the healthy Rebecca, the accountant Max had injured his right foot in the third match of the preliminary round and was still hospitalised. Ash decided to wait until the Five Hundred Years Festival had successfully concluded before going to visit him. As for Oscar who had defeated Max, no one knew where she had run off to today, and there was no trace of her. No one had seen her personal eyepatch-wearing maid either. After Rebecca looked around at everyone, she cleared her throat.

“These four days, all members of the organising committee have performed outstandingly. Thanks to everyone’s contributions, not only have this year’s activities received much public praise, there are also many newspapers and magazines that have expressed their hope for an interview.”

Rebecca normally maintained a serious expression during meetings, but she displayed a rare smile tonight. Seeing Rebecca smile like that, Ash’s mood was also uplifted.

“As the Student Council President, I feel incredibly proud. After getting through tomorrow, the Five Hundred Years Festival will have ended in success. But we cannot grow lax now, so we should all review the schedule for tomorrow.”

After she glazed over the small brochure in her hand, Rebecca continued

“The competitions to be held in the morning include the long-distance finals of the Dragon Riding Race, as well as various other finals. Following that is lunchtime, and then the highlight of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout will begin in the afternoon—”

“Excuse me.”

At this time, a stern voice interrupted Rebecca. And then the ‘clank...’ of metal was heard. After hearing such noises, Ash could not help but shudder. When he nervously turned around to look—

Sure enough, the person who had arrived was the First Princess Veronica Lautreamont. Following behind her with a blank expression was the captain of

her personal guard, Glenn McGuire. Both of them were faces that Ash had not seen in a long time. They had heard that a few hours ago — Veronica had boarded the magic ship *Claíomh Solais* in the name of the King of Chevron, though it seemed as though her mission was already over.

“Your Highness Veronica!”

After Anya just so happened to come out from the kitchen to realise that Veronica was present, she suddenly called out.

“Oh, it’s Anya. How is your new life?”

“I’m very well. Everyone is very kind to me so I’m very grateful to them.”

A faint smile appeared on Veronica’s face and she put her hand on top of Anya’s head.

“Then that’s good. Hmm, this waitress outfit really suits you. You should stop your life of violence and fighting, so that you can strive for a future of happiness.”

“T-Thank you very much...!”

Anya submissively bent over and bowed to Veronica. Speaking of which — Anya was released because of Veronica’s forgiveness. Ash remembered that this had happened.

“Avdocha-san hasn’t gone out today?”

In response to Anya’s question, Veronica simply touched on it lightly.

“That’s right. I’ve only assigned other tasks to her...would you like to see her?”

“Yes. When I was under being detained in the city, she took great care of me. Though I still don’t really understand why she was so kind to me. I originally thought that it was the friendship between fellow people from the same hometown, but that doesn’t seem to be the case...”

“She has her reasons. Speaking of which, aren’t you Ash Blake?”

Veronica suddenly cast her sharp gaze towards Ash. Ash quickly stood up.

“L-Long time no see, Princess Veronica...”

“Hmph. After not seeing you for a while, you seem to have grown a bit manlier.”

Never imagining that Veronica would praise him, Ash felt deeply surprised.

“—Even so, I cannot hand Silvia over to you yet.”

“A-A-Aneue! What are you saying...!”

Before Ash could say anything, Silvia voiced her objections. Seeing her younger sister like that, Veronica shook her head with disappointment and sighed.

“Seriously, I was only joking but you seem so shaken...it seems like you’re still immature. It’s because of your willpower being too weak that you won’t be able to become an Ark Dragonar. You should look at Rebecca as a role model.”

“Uh...”

Silvia suddenly became pale, and words could not leave her mouth. After Veronica joined in, the interrupted meeting resumed once more.

“In this Five Hundred Years Festival, aside from the Paladin Oswald, there are also many other members of royalty and nobility who have come to watch, and tomorrow’s VIP seats will certainly be decorated with national guests. Needless to say, they’ve all come to watch the final battle of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout.”

As one of the participants, Ash could not help but feel nervous and jittery.

“The Third Prince of the Chevron Kingdom Uriel came to watch on the first day, and Zacharias III will also be present tomorrow. This will inevitably require even more stringent security measures.”

Upon hearing the names of the Third Prince Uriel and Zacharias III, Ash’s nerves tingled. He recalled the information that Oscar had revealed.

—The prince who desired domination of the continent and wanted to annex the Knight Country.

—The old King who desired Eco’s blood because of a fallacy.

If what Oscar said was true, Ash did not want the two of them to meet Eco.

"I see. So is this is the reason why Veronica anesama<sup>[5]</sup> and Mirabel anesama have come to this meeting today?"

Veronica nodded solemnly in response to Silvia's question.

"Mmm. I would like to finalise the matters related to security as soon as possible with the principal and Student Council."

"Our Student Council is actually so valued by aneue...!"

"I don't value you people. I'm just afraid that you'll hold us back if a problem arises, and that will be troublesome."

Veronica coldly replied to Silvia who was initially spirited.

"So that's how it is..."

Silvia was disheartened, and her shoulders weakly collapsed. At this moment, Mirabel put her teacup down with a 'ding...'. Based on the way that she put her cup down, it was vaguely possible to tell that she was not in a good mood.

"...How irritating. Someone ruined my cute Silvanus and dares to show their face before me."

Mirabel directed her complaints towards Veronica.

"...Are you trying to pick a fight, Mirabel?"

"Veronica anesama is one of the VIPs? I suggest that you occasionally change into a beautiful dress, and stay at father's side like a princess should. It's because you're so rough that no man has ever dared to approach you."

"You...!"

The colour of Veronica's face immediately changed.

"It seems like that petty personality of yours still hasn't changed after becoming principal...!"

"I'm simply pointing out the facts."

Even though Veronica was emitting a powerful murderous intent, Mirabel remained nonchalant. Seeing the two sisters argue noisily, Ash felt confused. No, Ash was not the only person who was confused. Everyone present was dumbfounded as they silently observed the two heated sisters, Veronica and



Mirabel. No one dared to stand up between the fight of these two princesses, and the atmosphere in the restaurant plummeted to a freezing point. In light of this, Mirabel appeared to hold a grudge against Veronica for her destruction of the magic ship Silvanus. The designer of Silvanus was actually Mirabel. It was just that, strictly speaking, it was not Veronica's fault that Silvanus was destroyed. In order to rescue Eco who had awakened in the capital, sacrificing the Silvanus was the only way. If one was to pursue that further, Prince Julius was actually at the helm at the time. Strictly speaking, Veronica was also a victim. By reason, Mirabel already knew about this from the reports that she had received...

"When I handed Silvanus over to someone whose brain and chest is all muscle, that was indeed a mistake."

"What did you say...!"

Veronica stood up and was accompanied by the clattering sound of her armour. She then swiftly drew out the claymore which hung by her waist, and pointed it straight at Mirabel's nose.

"Hmph. That personality of yours which immediately resorts to violence never changes. Eunice, ready my sword."

Mirabel also stood up from her seat, and received a rapier from Eunice. Eunice didn't seem the least bit worried about her master's safety, and she blandly followed Mirabel's order with obedience. The First Princess and Third Princess respectively raised their weapons and prepared their stances. The flames of war were imminent. Ash did his best to maintain a natural tone while he asked Silvia

"Hey hey...is it alright not to stop them? What's happening to the two of them?"

Silvia let out a long sigh.

"The two of them have always been like this, they'll start a fight every time they meet. Their relationship is as incompatible as fire and water..."

"But is it really okay to get to the point where their swords are against each other?"

“There’s no need to worry. Despite how Mirabel anesama looks very scholarly and academic, once she picks up that rapier, she’ll turn into a master who won’t lose even to a first-class swordsman.”

“It doesn’t seem to match her appearance...”

While Ash murmured that, either consciously or subconsciously, his eyes drifted towards the door. Glenn, who served as the captain of Veronica’s personal guard, also seemed to be quite accustomed to the habits of these two sisters. He quietly stood upright by the door and didn’t move.

“You should think about what words you want to have engraved on your tombstone — Mirabel!”

“I’m simply here to guide you on what a lady’s achievements should be, you muscle demon!”

As their killing intent spread, they began to trade fierce blows with each other. Mirabel’s smooth swordsmanship allowed her to fend off Veronica’s swings of brute force. And with a sudden thrust so fast that it was barely visible, the flowing movements of her sword were like water.

“Princess Mirabel is amazing too...”

Although he felt bad for Veronica, Ash could not help but feel captivated by Mirabel’s incredible skill.

“Hey! You’re not allowed to look at Mirabel anesama with impure thoughts!”

But Silvia glared at him, and Ash felt embarrassed.

“You misunderstand! I absolutely don’t have any strange thoughts, I simply think that it’s very beautiful. And why are you angry about this, Princess-sama?”

“Y-You don’t even understand something so simple!?”

“Ash-sama, Princess-sama is jealous.”

Cosette casually commented from the sidelines.

“Idiot—! Don’t spout such nonsense!”

Probably because her reason had been leaked out, Silvia’s face turned as red as a cooked octopus.

“Hold on! I can’t let that go after hearing it.”

This time, Eco pulled on Ash’s sleeve. Although he thought that all her attention was focused on eating, it seemed as though she had been eavesdropping. When Ash was attacked by both Eco and Silvia, Veronica and Mirabel had both also gotten quite fired up.

“Damn it, these little tricks!”

Veronica seemed somewhat frustrated as she brandished her claymore wildly. If she blocked it directly, then Mirabel’s rapier would snap in an instant.

“Moves that just rely on brute force won’t work on me!”

Mirabel was naturally well aware of that. That was why she deliberately angled her rapier so that she could disperse the pressure of Veronica’s swing. Her fighting style seemed to revolve around a predictable flow.





To some extent, her swordsmanship was an example of her scholarly style. However, the sisters couldn't be permitted to continue fighting like this mindlessly. After all, the important meeting had been delayed because of their confrontation, and it would also cause problems for the restaurant. Ash spoke to Rebecca while trying to pretend as though nothing had happened

“Rebecca-san...isn't it about time to stop them...?”

“I also feel that way, but this is a duel between women. It would be rude if we recklessly intervened.”

Even Rebecca had no choice but to surrender with a bitter smile, but she suddenly turned to look at Silvia.

“Yes, Silvia, as their younger sister, you must know the solution to this, right? You should understand your own older sisters more than anyone else here.”

“M-Me? But...once the two of them start fighting, they won't listen to anyone's persuasion. I think we can only wait until they run out of energy...”

After saying that, Silvia sighed heavily.

## Part 5

After waiting until Veronica and Mirabel finally stopped—

“Zu, zu...”

Eco was already fast asleep at her seat. She probably couldn't resist the temptation to sleep after eating her fill. Even during the meeting earlier, Eco was the only one who ate continuously.

“It can't be helped.”

Ash revealed a bitter smile. He took off his uniform jacket and draped it over Eco. Eco's sleeping face was still as innocent as ever. Even if he watched all night long, he wouldn't grow tired of it. Inadvertently, Ash's gaze stopped on <<Avalon's Bracelet>> that Eco wore on her right hand. This was the special bracelet that was given to Eco by the Mother Dragon. So long as she learned how to use the bracelet, it seemed like Eco would be able to choose between her dragon form or human form. In order to reach that goal, Eco nested in the Dragon Workshop every day to practice. She was working hard to prevent a recurrence of a similar incident to the one that had shocked the capital of Fontaine City—

After Ash secretly strengthened his determination, the time for dessert had arrived. Anya came around to place the plates of dessert on the table one by one.

“Fuwafuwa...eh, this smell...could it possibly be...”

Although she was originally yawning, Eco seemed to have been awoken by the smell of the baked pastries. She suddenly opened her eyes wide, and sat her body upright.

“Your snack has also been prepared.”

Anya smiled wryly as she placed the plate down in front of Eco. The item on the plate was a Mille Crepe that was widely welcomed by students.

“Uwah...it looks delicious...!”

Although she hadn't eaten any yet, Eco's face was already in a daze. To Eco who loved crepes the most, the crepe which had pastry that was stacked layer upon layer with fresh cream in between was equivalent to being the most delicious thing in the world. At this moment, Mirabel suddenly lifted her head.

“—Yes, there's something that's always been on my mind.”

All of the people who were about to pick up their fork stopped, and their eyes all focused on Mirabel. Eco was the only one who hungrily opened her mouth to chomp down on the crepe.

“I'm very curious as to what the black crystal on the Maestro Tristan's forehead is. My impression is that I once saw a very similar black crystal in a piece of literature in the past...but I can't recall what it was exactly, so it's quite frustrating.”

“...I thought it was just a normal decoration. There are a lot of students who have their Pals wear accessories, and there aren't any rules to strictly prohibit them in the academy.”

Silvia replied in a swift manner, though the expression on her face appeared to be one of surprise.

“When you mention it, it does indeed feel a little unpleasant.”

“I've also discovered...that black crystal seems to harbour a strange power.”

Eco and Lucca expressed reactions contrary to Silvia. Eco was a dragon, so her intuition was much sharper than a human's. Because Lucca was a member of the Elbaff Tribe, she also had a unique sense of intuition. Since both of them held suspicions, perhaps there really was some kind of unknown secret — Ash felt somewhat anxious.

“The Calm Before The Storm *A.S.B.1365.10*” is closed.

# Chapter 4 - Ashley Trapped

## Part 1

Early morning — in the boys' dormitory, Apollo House.

Celes awoke in Oscar's bedroom. The bright rays of morning sun burst into the room through the cracks of the curtains. It appeared as though today would have clear autumn weather. This kind of weather was perfect for the final events of the Five Hundred Years Festival.

"...So this day has finally arrived?"

With the mood of a soldier preparing for battle, Celes muttered to herself. She reached out to grab the eye patch that had been placed beside her pillow, and then put it on her left eye. A desire to hide the physical features which she did not want others to see — Celes held such feelings, similar to how Ash used bandages to hide the <Seikoku> on his left arm.

"The more I think about it, the more infuriating it is..."

Realising that she had something in common with Ash caused Celes to pout angrily. She felt amazed at the fact that of all days, it had to be this morning that she realised this fact. After Celes got up from the bed, she began to get dressed. She put on her jet-black outfit with familiarity, she combed her silver hair and tied it into a ponytail, and with that, the Celes-style maid ensemble was complete. After checking herself in front of the mirror, Celes moved to the bedside.

"...I'm grateful, Oscar. My days as your personal maid have actually been quite enjoyable. Even if I only became your maid because I was following orders from that person..."

Oscar was still fast asleep on the bed. The breasts that she normally kept carefully hidden had now been liberated, and were clearly bulging underneath her pyjamas. Celes quietly stared at Oscar's sleeping face for a good while.



“If you were raised as a girl...then you would surely have a bunch of guys from the court chasing after the hems of your dress.”

Celes muttered as she fixed Oscar’s sleepwear.

“When I think back about it, your mother was also rather cruel.”

After Celes covered Oscar with a blanket, she turned around. She walked over to the table and picked up the pen that sat upon it. After writing a letter of farewell, Celes put the pen down and then headed for the door. There was a bright red bag at the entrance. Celes had secretly prepared it and placed it there last night. The bag had a black skull embroidered onto it, Celes’ favourite. As Celes exited the room and stepped into the corridor, she reached out backwards with her hand to quietly shut the room door.

“I seem to remember that that filthy insect lives on the third floor.”

After bringing the bag up to her shoulder, Celes headed towards the stairwell.

## Part 2

—*Nibble nibble....*

Whilst lying in bed, Ash suddenly received a sweet nibble on his earlobe and could not help but feel goose bumps.

“Ngh...you can’t, Eco...”

It had already been a long time since Eco first practiced a dragon’s peculiar habit of nibbling on its owner. Most likely because it was before the final battle, Eco had also begun to feel nervous. However, the alarm clock hadn’t yet sounded, so Ash hoped to sleep for just a bit longer. Ash turned over, and freed himself from Eco’s entanglement at the same time.

—*Nibble!*

But Eco chomped down on him again. This time it was his flank.

“Oww...!”

It was such a pleasant sensation that Ash’s entire body arched as if in climax.

“This can’t be possible! I didn’t think that Eco’s nibbling would feel so comfortable...!”

Ash cried out unintentionally. Indeed, Eco never knew how to restrain her power, so she only ever gave Ash pain.

“Fufu. You finally realised.”

A tender, heart-warming voice teased Ash’s eardrums.

“Navi!?”

As soon as he opened his eyes, Ash was dazed by the scene before him. It was because a completely naked Navi was straddling on top of his body. Moreover, even Ash was completely nude. There was only a piece of thin white silk covering the lower half of his body.

“Could this place be...!”

Ash frantically looked around. The floorboards had a checkered black and white pattern. The walls were lined with sets of armour for what seemed like the human body and the place was reminiscent of a castle. A mosaic of crystal chandeliers containing Bright Dragon Crystals hung down from the ceiling. In the middle of the room was an antique bedframe, and Ash was on top of it. It was a rather familiar sight. It happened during early summer — when he was taking part in the Selective Training Camp at Allonnes Lake, Ash recalled the incident where he attempted to ride Gawain. Ash was severely injured at the time, and his body was transported to this room through Navi's power.

“Welcome to the Dragon Workshop. It's been a long time since we last saw each other like this.”

Navi smiled as she said so. Regardless of whether it was that lustrous pink hair or the outline of her facial features, both Navi and Eco looked very similar. However, Navi was at a different stage of growth compared to Eco, and she was already a mature person. The horns on her head were as sharp as a dragon's, and her body was also quite slender. Despite her young and beautiful appearance, Navi was actually the embodiment of knowledge that dragon race had accumulated over time. Ash naturally could only understand this to some degree, but she was basically like an intelligent being that had sprouted from the vessel of information itself.

“Navi, why did you bring me here? Is it an important matter?”

Although Ash tried to ask in a normal tone, the problem was the fact that both of them were completely naked. His voice was uncontrollably high pitched and sharp. Moreover, there was only a thin piece of silk draped over Navi's body, while her lower body was closely affixed to Ash's abdomen, separated only by a thin piece of silk. Even if Ash was in a 'normal' bodily state, he could still clearly feel Navi's soft touch against his own body.

“Ara, you're no fun. I can't call you over if there isn't a problem? Ever since Eco received <<Avalon's Bracelet>> from the Mother Dragon, I've had to train her every day. What's wrong with rewarding a bit of my hard work?”

As if she was trying to get a closer look at Ash's face, she brought her own face closer. Looking closer, her expression seemed to have calmed. But she was

right, saying something like 'Is it an important matter?' as soon as he saw her was rather rude. Ash reflected on his own words.

"Speaking of that, is the training going well?"

"Eco is actually working pretty hard. Although she's full of complaints, that child is serious about wanting to learn how to use <<Avalon's Bracelet>>. I wonder if it's the power of love that's driving her to work so hard?"

"W-What are you saying!?"

Seeing Ash act so flustered, Navi shook her large breasts, as if to further his embarrassment. Ash quickly averted his eyes while his heart pounded so wildly that he could even hear the flutter of his heartbeat in his own ears.

"Fufu. Since it's a rare opportunity for us to be alone, let's not talk about such uninteresting topics. If you want to...do you want to have some fun?"

"Wait a second! This isn't right!"

"Why?"

Navi tilted her head sideways a bit, and seductively reached out with her right hand. Her right hand gently caressed Ash's chest and abdomen.

"Ooh...! A-As I said, stop...!"

"Fufu. Isn't this like how I teased you the first time we met?"

Navi's moist lips suddenly sucked on Ash's neck. And then, Navi's lips slid across Ash's skin. Navi's silky long hair also accompanied her movements and tickled Ash's skin. Ash was struck with a thrill of pleasure and couldn't help but arch his body. The thought of 'If I let Navi do as she pleases, it might not be bad to see where she leads me to...' streaked across his mind.

"Haa, hah..."

Ash continued to pant loudly, while Navi also gradually became aroused as she exhaled hot breaths. Navi, who had always been calm and seemed to be in a detached position actually seemed excited right now. This only caused Ash's heartbeat to race even faster.... But in the next instant, Ash came back to his senses.



“I can’t do this after all, Navi! I like you too Navi, but we can’t keep on playing around like this!”

“Do you feel as though...doing something like this is equivalent to betraying Eco?”

“T-That is also one of the reasons...”

Ash endured Navi’s caresses while he squeezed out a reply.

“Don’t worry, playfulness like this will one day transform into one of Eco’s own experiences.”

Navi stopped sitting on top of Ash’s body and lay down beside him. She held his face up with her hands and looked carefully at Ash’s face. Every move she made was filled with a sexy charm, and even though he knew that he shouldn’t look, Ash couldn’t separate his gaze from Navi’s body. Her bright red eyes glistened and reflected Ash’s face within them.

“Didn’t I explain it to you before? Eco will become one with me in the future, and she will reign at the summit of the dragon race. As long as you think of it like this, then it’s not cheating.”

“...But, doesn’t that make you feel lonely?”

Perhaps realising that Ash was serious, Navi’s expression also became serious.

“Why? I’ve always been an existence created for such a purpose, so I don’t feel loneliness. This is the law of nature for the dragon race.”

“I can’t accept that! Even if the dragon race agrees, I absolutely won’t!”

Ash energetically sat upright. He grabbed onto both of Navi’s shoulders and pushed her down on the bed. In an instant exchange of positions, Ash had gone on top, while Navi was below.

“In my eyes, Navi is also an important companion.”

“Eh...?”

“I don’t want to lose Navi, not even a bit.”

“I-If you say such things...it troubles me.”

It was the first time that Navi appeared to be embarrassed in front of Ash. Not

only was Navi shaken, her entire face was also flushed and she seemed fidgety.

“Navi? What’s wrong?”

After Ash asked in surprise, Navi turned her face to the side with an overwhelmed expression.

“You’re such a cunning man. If you say such things, then I...”

Not only her cheeks, but even Navi’s earlobes and neck had turned completely red. Moreover, her previously bold attitude where she seemed undaunted for anyone to see her nude body was completely different now, and she crossed her arms in front of her chest in apparent shyness. After saying that much, she turned silent and seemed self-conscious.

“W-What’s wrong?”

Ash persevered with his question, but Navi still refused to answer. Ash was staring at her so intently that he even forgot to blink. The usual Navi who was always rather devilish and overbearing when she enjoyed teasing Ash was now like a pure maiden with a delicate expression. However, this reaction was by no means a rejection of Ash’s intentions. The evidence was that Navi would occasionally steal a peek at Ash, as if waiting for him to take the next step. And as soon as her gaze intersected with Ash’s, she would immediately avert her eyes in a manner that made her look increasingly shy.

*—Kuh, you’re the cunning one Navi! If you act so cute in front of a boy, even I won’t be able to resist stepping over that boundary...!*

Ash’s reason was on the brink of collapse — and at that moment, Ash’s body felt an astonishingly powerful sense of attraction, instantly pulling him away from Navi’s body. Ash frantically looked behind him and noticed that a dark vortex had appeared near the wall.

“Uwah! What’s going on!?”

“This is...”

Navi quickly stood up from the bed and stared directly into the dark vortex. The expression on her face now was the same calm expression that she normally had.

“Someone is trying to forcefully awaken your body. You had best go back early to—”

“Uwaaaaaaaah!”

With no time to finish listening to Navi’s words, Ash’s body was sucked into the darkness of the vortex.

## Part 3

“—Hey, you filthy insect.”

A sharp voice awakened Ash from his slumber. Ash awoke drowsily, as he was still half-asleep. It felt as though he had a rather flirtatious dream with Navi—

“Mmm...please. Let me sleep for a bit longer...then I'll be fine...”

Ash turned back around into a comfortable sleeping position. Feeling a bit cold, he reached for his blanket. But he couldn't find his blanket no matter where he reached for it. Did Eco snatch it away from him?

“Tsk, just how long are you going to keep sleeping for!?”

All of a sudden, he felt a powerful pressure against his back.

“Uwah! What!?”

Ash was fully awake at last.

*—That's right, I was supposed to be with Navi in the Dragon Workshop...*

When he recalled Navi's lavish and alluring nude body, Ash couldn't stop himself from blushing and his heartbeat from accelerating, but his reason was quickly restored. Yes, the reason why Ash's consciousness was forcibly sent back here was because someone had insisted on waking up Ash's physical body. Although it was a dimly lit room, there were rays of sunlight which passed through the cracks in the curtains, so it was not entirely dark. Ash wanted to jump straight up, but contrary to his expectations, he was unable to move. There was a strange pressure against his back. Like this, Ash lay on the bed, unable to move.

“Is that you Eco!?”

Ash struggled to turn his head to the side, and looked towards the direction of the pillow. He saw Eco holding onto a stuffed dragon soft toy, showing a sweet face while immersed in her sleep.

“Zuu, zuuu...unyah...”

It seemed as though the perpetrator was not Eco.

“Hey, where are you looking? I’m over here!”

Under the scathing correction, Ash turned to look at the other side.

“Uwah! Why are you here!?”

Ash lay on the bed in astonishment. He simply watched as Celes crossed her arms over her chest, while she stepped on his back with one leg.

“P-Please take your foot off...it seriously hurts!”

“Hmph. If you’re a man then you shouldn’t be screaming about an ache of this extent.”

After the eyepatch maid fiercely shot back, she exerted even more force. The pressure against Ash’s back grew stronger and stronger.

“Owowowowow...!”

Celes’ seemingly slender frame didn’t convey the strength of her legs. Although it wasn’t as scary as Eco when she used her full power, it felt as though she had undergone some intense training. Why had Celes infiltrated Ash’s room? Did Oscar send her? *No, it can’t be...* Ash immediately gave up on that possibility. Oscar had absolute confidence in her own strength, so it wasn’t possible for her to resort to such underhanded means on the morning of the decisive battle. ...However, the most pressing problem was Celes’ current position. She had raised one of her legs to stamp down on Ash’s back. Compared to the average maid outfit, the black dress she wore had a rather short skirt. So from the perspective of Ash as he lay on the bed, her black underwear with its lace decorations were all in full view. After Ash averted his eyes away from Celes crotch, he quietly said

“So even your underwear is black huh...”

“Waah!”

After Celes let out a strange cry, she hurriedly retracted her leg and held her skirt down with both hands.





It was rather unexpected that she was someone quick to become embarrassed.

“I should say this first; I didn’t look at them intentionally, but accidentally.”

Ash explained as he quickly straightened himself and sat upright.

“...Forget it. I’ll get right to the point.”

Surprisingly, Celes didn’t seem to pursue the issue any further, and instead went to open up the bag that had been placed on the ground by her feet. It was a red bag with the pattern of a skull embroidered onto it. From the rays of light that penetrated through the gaps in the curtains, the contents of the bag were vaguely visible.

“Hey! You...! That’s...”

Ash had a bad feeling about this. The item that Celes removed from the bag was a set of the Academy’s girls’ uniform and a wig of long hair. As well as feminine undergarments to top it all off.

“Here, hurry up and change into these.”

Ash began to sweat profusely.

“T-These couldn’t be...”

Celes sneered as she said

“That’s right, this is the beautiful Ashley’s special costume.”

“You’re forcing me to crossdress again!? Why!?”

Ash’s brain was in disorder. If Oscar won today’s decisive battle, Ash would have to crossdress as her bride. And at that time, Ash would be forced to live his life as Ashley Blake from then on. Of course, Ash’s dragon Eco would also have to live together with Oscar. On the other hand, if Ash was to become today’s victor, Oscar would no longer pursue Eco, she would have to give up on her ambition to marry Ash, and she would also withdraw her inappropriate marriage proposal to Rebecca. ...That was what Ash and Oscar had agreed on. The battle against Oscar clearly had not begun yet, so why did he have to dress like a girl?

“Pipe down, you filthy insect. If you don’t cooperate obediently...”

As Celes spoke with a threatening tone of voice, she reached into her bosom. And from there she took out a clump of steel. The instant that he grasped the true identity of that object, Ash felt goose bumps across his entire body. The object that Celes had taken out and pointed at him was a small magic pistol. Its design utilised energy from a Bright Dragon Crystal to fire bullets.

“...Are you threatening me with that? I don’t think Oscar would be happy with you doing something like this.”

“Hmph, you sound as though you’re quite familiar with Oscar. But you know, it’s true that Oscar doesn’t like to use underhanded means.”

“Then why are you...?”

“Because this is my own decision. Enough of this, hurry up and change, or else I’ll—”

After saying that much, Celes moved the muzzle slightly. The muzzle was aimed at Eco’s innocent figure.

“Don’t blame me for shooting off her limbs.”

The expression in Celes’ eyes was serious.

“Umu, it looks...delicious. Munya munya...”

Even though it was clearly a life or death situation, Eco still continued to sleep talk while remaining carefree.

“Kuh...”

Ash bitterly clenched his teeth. Celes had taken action on her own, and it had nothing to do with Oscar. Just what did this mean? No, even if Celes insisted that this was her own ‘arbitrary’ behaviour, was it really true? It was possible that someone was secretly manipulating Celes. The first person that Ash could think of as a suspect was Zacharias III of the Chevron Kingdom.

—*The old king who covets Eco’s blood...*

Although he couldn’t rule out the possibility of Celes being a pawn for him, when Ash thought about his options, he believed that his top priority was to

protect Eco's safety.

“...Fine. I'll listen to your request so put the gun away.”

## Part 4

*—Seriously, what am I doing...?*

Ash thought as he held down the wig that was nearly blown away by the cool early morning wind. Celes took Ash who was disguised as a girl boldly through the Academy's front entrance as they left. Although there were many teaching staff, guards, and dragon stable workers on the campus grounds as they walked through, no one seemed to have any doubts about Celes or Ash. On the contrary, those people even held warm expressions as they stared at Ash from head to toe while breathing in a strangely excited manner.

*—Seriously, please don't stare at me so much with eyes like that...*

While sighing, Ash realised the reason why he was forced to change. Ash had recently become something of a famous celebrity. Since he held the spotlight, if he was discovered to have left in the morning with Celes, it would look suspicious to anyone. That was why Celes forced Ash to crossdress as a girl. Once he had crossdressed as a girl, unless he came across someone that he was well acquainted with, it was almost impossible for him to be recognised as Ash.

"Come on, move faster."

Celes picked up her pace as she walked onto a road with few pedestrians and hurried Ash along. In the end, Celes stopped her legs at the dragon coach station. There was just one dragon carriage parked there.

"Please take us to Lake Rubina."

After Celes gave the destination, the old coachman apologetically answered

"Because of the Five Hundred Years Festival, all roads have been blocked off for quite a while. If guests are insistent on departure, I'm afraid it will be a large detour..."

"I don't mind."

"Well, hop on then ladies."

After Celes and Ash boarded, the coachman started the dragon carriage. After



a while, the dragon carriage left the city through the main gates. From here on, it was considered to be outside the city. Just as the coachman had said, streets had been closed off, and the dragon carriage weaved through uneven roads and detours as it advanced. There were no passer-by's or vehicles in the vicinity. While enduring the rattling of the four-wheeled carriage, Ash asked Celes

“Hey, Celes. What are you trying to do by taking me to Lake Rubina?”

“Who said you were allowed to ask questions? Also, don't forget that you're Ashley right now. Use a feminine voice for me and speak like a lady.”

“Don't be so unreasonable. Why not speak for yourself, you're clearly a woman, but you don't act ladylike at all.”

“...Did you say something?”

After being fiercely glared at by Celes, Ash shut his mouth in silence.

## Part 5

After more than an hour, Ash and Celes finally arrived at Lake Rubina. Speaking of Lake Rubina, this was the fateful place where Ash had stumbled upon Oscar's secret. The memory of Oscar's naked body inadvertently surfaced within Ash's mind, causing his cheeks to become hot. After the coachman accepted the fare from Celes, it appeared that he didn't find it strange at all for two girls to come to the lake so early in the morning, and so he drove off.

"I wish he was more doubtful..."

Ash sighed as he saw off the dragon carriage that gradually disappeared from view. Although Lake Rubina was a tourist attraction for picnics and fishing, it was rather desolate right now. After all, it was still early, and today was also the last day of the Five Hundred Years Festival. The people who would visit Lake Rubina on a day such as this would certainly be rather odd ones.

"What are you dreaming about? Hurry up and move."

"You want me to move, but where to!? You didn't come here for a leisurely fishing trip right?"

"Hah? Since when did I say I'd come fishing with someone like you? Look, the destination is over there."

There was a dilapidated old house that stood not far from the lake. No, it felt more appropriate to describe that house as a ruin. It looked like a villa from a bygone era.

"Let's go, we're going in there, Ashley."

"Hold on, even if it's a ruin, we can't just trespass there!"

Upon hearing Ash's cry, Celes turned around sharply with a fiery expression on her face.

"Hey, filthy insect. Your current identity is Ashley. So behave more like a girl!"

Celes reached out with her right hand and flipped Ash's skirt upwards. A cool breeze blew across his lower body.

“Waaah!”

Ash reflexively pushed his skirt down. His thighs involuntarily moved together and his knees hugged each other. Ash’s entire face had gone red. In fact, he had also been forced to change into girls’ underwear, so he didn’t want anyone to see that no matter what.

“Hmph. That’s a pretty cute reaction. That’s more like Ashley.”

After Celes smiled mischievously, she walked through the rusty gate.

Originally, the rusted entrance was locked, but Celes took a lock-picking tool out of her red bag and easily unlocked the door.

“Hey...why do you have tools like that?”

“Nonsense, all maids keep these things by their sides.”

“I don’t want these kinds of maids!”

The two of them exchanged harmless arguments as they stepped into the house. After reaching the end of the hallway that was covered in cobwebs, Celes picked one of the guest rooms. As soon as Celes opened the door, the Oracle mechanisms activated, illuminating the interior. Although the building itself seemed to have been abandoned, the crystal lights were still able to function. Inside the room, there was only a small desk and a bookcase for reading, as well as a bed. The windows were blocked by nailed wooden planks, so the only light source came from the dragon crystal lights that hung from the ceiling.

*—What does she want to do by bringing me to this isolated place...?*

The reason why Ash was so obedient was purely to protect Eco’s safety. Since he had already come to a location so far from the Academy, his original objective had been achieved. So, now was a good time to hear the real purpose of this excursion from Celes’ mouth.

“Say, Celes. Isn’t it about time you tell me what you—”

“Hey, Ashley.”

Unfortunately, Ash was interrupted just as he had opened his mouth to speak. It was because Celes had put the bag down by her feet, and then pushed Ash

without warning.

“Uwah!”

Because Ash had received an unexpected attack, he fell onto the bed without any resistance. Not only was the bed’s mattress damaged quite severely, it also smelt somewhat mouldy.

“W-What are you doing!?”

Ash complained, but Celes took advantage of this opportunity to fix the hem of his flipped-up skirt before leaping on top of him like a female leopard. She also used both of her hands to hold Ash’s cheeks tightly. After being gripped by her cold palms, Ash shivered as he looked straight back.

“What are you trying to do?”

“Looking at you like this...you’re actually quite a beautiful girl.”

Her clear eye fixedly gazed upon Ash’s face. Feeling Celes’ breath against his skin caused Ash’s heartbeat to rapidly accelerate. She had delicate doll-like facial features and a black leather eyepatch. There was also a whiff of a minty fragrance. Celes reluctantly frowned, and then let out a sigh.

“It’s truly quite a complex feeling when a man is actually prettier than me.”

After saying that, Celes finally let go of Ash. Despite her abrupt personality, that depressed look of hers was filled with girlhood, and Ash couldn’t help but find it pleasant.

“How could that be, aren’t you way cuter than me, Celes?”

“C-Cute—?”

Celes’ cheeks turned bright red. Her adorable expression seemed quite refreshing, but Ash’s expression was serious.

“Celes, tell me honestly. What is your motive?”

Celes suddenly lowered her head, and used a muffled voice to answer.

“My current actions are all for the sake of that person.”

“This so-called person...are you referring to the King of Chevron?”

Celes didn't reply. She simply stared at Ash in silence.

"How strange. Since the aim of the King of Chevron is Eco's blood, you're working towards that...but why hold me hostage? By reason, Eco should be a better choice for a hostage, right? Or could it be that your aim is to separate me and Eco first!?"

Ash felt a chill run down his spine. If there were other accomplices to help Celes, then Eco was in danger. Eco was currently completely oblivious to the situation, and she was leisurely asleep. But Celes avoided Ash's questions.

"Listen carefully, Ashley. No matter what happens in the arena, you'll be safe as long as you stay here. Be good and stay here the entire day for me."

"What? I don't get what you mean..."

"You don't need to understand."

After Celes let go of Ash's body, she cast her face aside. Ash could only try to ask in another way

"Say...Celes, do you really have to do this? The final battle of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout is the biggest event of the Five Hundred Years Festival. Oscar may not have verbalised it, but she was really looking forward to this match, right? I don't think she'll be happy to win without a fight."

"I understand that more clearly than anyone else!"

Although she was usually rather cold, Celes' expression changed, and she suddenly turned into an active volcano as she roared out.

"...Damn you! I lose control of my emotions every time I talk to you. The time for talking is over."

After gloomily muttering that, Celes jumped back on top of Ash's body again. In the next instant, Ash's entire body stiffened. Celes' lips sealed Ash's mouth. On top of that, her warm tongue forced its way through his lips, and into Ash's mouth. Ash tried to resist, but both sides of his cheeks were tightly clasped between Celes' hands.

"Mmm...!"

It was a tongue kiss that was sweet, yet also carried a taste of danger. Could it



be the taste of Celes' saliva? There was a flavour that seemed to resemble peppermint that gradually spread in his mouth. Ash was so surprised that he subconsciously couldn't help but gulp and swallow the mouthful of liquid into his stomach.

“.....”

Eventually, Celes slowly moved away from his lips. A strand of saliva connecting the two of them stretched as they separated, but it soon broke.

“Ce...les...?”

At that moment, Ash's body quickly shivered, and it felt as though the entire world spun around him. No, Ash was the one who tumbled down. As if being unable to withstand the weight of his body, Ash was paralysed upon the bed.

“T-This is...how could...? My head.....it's diz.....zy...”

His consciousness had become hazy, and it felt as though he was about to fall asleep at any time. At some point in time, Celes' right hand had grabbed a small bottle.

“Don't worry, it's just a sleeping drug.”

Ash understood the significance of that sudden kiss.

“Why did you have to do it...Celes? You...I don't understand...”

Celes turned around without saying a single word. Her silver ponytail swayed along with her head. *Her back looks so lonely...* Ash thought. With her back to Ash, Celes quietly said “No matter what happens, please don't give up on Oscar as a friend.”

Her tone was completely different from the usual Celes, and it was extremely gentle.

“What are you saying...?”

“Ever since she got to know you, Oscar has inexplicably become full of life. Even I couldn't help but feel jealous...that's why I don't want to let you die.”

After saying that, Celes clicked her tongue. What exactly was going on? The only thing that was certain right now was the fact that Celes truly cared for

Oscar.... —After considering that much, Ash realised that he was no longer able to support himself. His consciousness felt heavy as if he was sinking into mud. If he relaxed for even a moment, it felt as though he would sink into a deep slumber. Even so, Ash clenched his teeth and managed to maintain his consciousness.

“Hey, Celes...please tell me. Who are you fighting against...?”

However, Ash had already reached his limit. Unable to wait for Celes’ reply, Ash’s consciousness was sucked into a deep slumber.

The effect of the sleeping drug was powerful, and Ash fell into a deep sleep. It was an extremely potent drug made from the Lafon family’s knowledge of medicinal herbs that had been passed down throughout the generations. Its effects would most likely not endanger his life, but it would allow him to sleep for as long as half a day.

“Hmph, even your sleeping face is like a beautiful girl’s...”

After Celes coldly mumbled, she recalled the sensation of her lips when they had been affixed to Ash’s, causing her entire face to instantly turn red.

“N-No! I did that so that he could quickly swallow the drug, it was a last resort...there are no other people here, so who am I explaining this to!?”

As if to vent her anger, Celes kicked away the bag at her feet. When she kicked it like that, the black fabric that was in the bag fell out. It was a crumpled robe. It looked like a wizard’s robe from a story. Celes took off her maid outfit to reveal her doll-like nude body. The dragon crystal lights clearly revealed her white porcelain skin.

“It would be more appropriate for the current me to wear ugly clothes like this...”

While deriding herself, she put on the long robe along with its hood.

“After all, I am a descendant of <sup><Pluto></sup> Hades Stone...I never had the right to accompany you, Oscar.”

Finally, Celes took a mask out of the bag. It was a smooth, white mask. Because there were no decorations on it at all, it let off an eerie and demonic

atmosphere. After putting the mask on, Celes turned around to look at Ash's sleeping face as she whispered

“Filthy insect — no, Ash Blake. Even if Oscar is to be wanted as a traitor...you must believe in her.”

## Part 6

[—Hey, Ash! What are you doing!? No matter how much you love the bed, you should know when enough is enough!]

Immediately after the voice that rebuked him came the sound of a pounding at the door. Even the heavy sleeper Eco couldn't stand that noise.

“Uun...what is it...?”

Eco rubbed her sleepy eyes as she murmured. Based on the voice and its tone, she could infer that the person knocking on the door was Silvia.

“Mmm...Ash...why aren't you getting the door? Silvia is looking for you...”

She didn't hear any response from Ash for a long time. Eco found it strange, so she reached out to her side. All that her hand felt was the cold touch of the silver pocket-watch that had been left on the bed.

“Ash!?”

Realising that something was amiss, her drowsiness was instantly swept away. She jumped off the bed and looked around the entire room. But Ash was nowhere to be seen.

[Ash! What's going on!? Answer me! It's already long past the meeting time!]

Silvia's voice continued to resound outside the door.

[Ash-sama, are you feeling unwell?]

The voice that sounded uneasy belonged to Jessica.

[The meeting time has already passed. To be late...is simply unfitting of Ash's style.]

It was also vaguely possible to hear Luka's voice.

[Ash isn't an undisciplined kind of person. He couldn't possibly have overslept on such an important day...]

As for this calm sounding voice, it belonged to Rebecca. As if seeking help, Eco

opened the room's door. As soon as the door opened, Silvia, Jessica and Luka all consecutively tumbled into the room.

"Hold on...!"

Eco struggled awkwardly underneath the three people who had fallen on top of her. Rebecca was the only one who stood by idly.

"Eco! Where is Ash? Is he still asleep?"

Silvia asked with an interrogative tone.

"I don't know either! When I woke up, Ash was already gone..."

"Could he be in the toilet?"

Jessica interjected between Silvia and Eco.

"No, that's not possible."

Rebecca pulled out her silver pocket watch to confirm the time.

"It's already been fifteen minutes since we came to Ash's room. Using the toilet for fifteen minutes is too long. So he should be in a restaurant or the shower room..."

"I'm going to search the dorms just in case!"

Jessica frantically rushed off.

"I'll go with Gawain...to search outside the dorm."

After Jessica ran off, Luka also quickly flew off.

"We should first investigate this room in the meantime. Excuse us, Eco."

Seeing Rebecca's calm attitude, Eco felt somewhat relieved. As long as the problem was left to such a strong and reliable Student Council President, she felt as though she would definitely be able to solve the problem that she herself was unable to.

"Eco, are these Ash's pyjamas?"

"Yes, definitely."

Rebecca kneeled down on the floor to examine Ash's pyjamas.



“Hmm. Although it’s not obvious, there’s still a faint trace of body heat.”

“Body heat...!”

In her surprise, Eco could not stop herself from repeating the phrase. Turning to look at Silvia by her side, her face was also dyed red.

“Oh come on, what are you two maidens reacting to?”

A grin surfaced on Rebecca’s face as she admonished Eco and Silvia.

“In any case, we can probably be certain that Ash changed out of his pyjamas before leaving. But if that really is the case, then it’s somewhat dubious...”

Rebecca’s gaze drifted towards the wall. The uniforms of Ash and Eco were hung up on the wall. In fact, Eco was rather fond of the image of how both of their uniforms were hung up like a matching pair. Rebecca took a glance at the boys’ uniform and then folded her arms in front of her chest in thought.

“Ash’s uniform is still in this room — this means that he didn’t leave for the meeting.”

What Rebecca stated was certainly reasonable. If he was going to attend a meeting with the Student Council, then it stood to reason that Ash would change into his uniform. In a sudden burst of inspiration, Eco ran to examine the wardrobe. She examined each one of Ash’s casual outfits, but the more she investigated, the stranger it seemed.

“Is there something wrong, Eco?”

After Silvia asked, Eco stuck her face out of the closet.

“...How strange. Just what kind of outfit did Ash wear outside?”

“In other words, all of Ash’s clothes are in this room without a doubt...?”

Silvia tilted her head in confusion.

“Hmm. Something doesn’t match up...”

Rebecca folded her arms as she solemnly contemplated the problem. Eco’s uneasiness only grew.

“—Hey, you three!”

At that moment, someone burst into the room while shouting loudly, startling Eco so much that her shoulders twitched. The uninvited guest who stood at the door catching their breath as their shoulders heaved up and down was Oscar. Although Oscar was wearing her usual uniform that had undergone some minor adjustments, her hair was in a mess and she didn't look like a noble at all. It was safe to assume that she had gotten out of bed not long ago. *What is he panicking about...?* Eco thought to herself in surprise.

"Have you seen Celes?"

"Calm down first, Oscar. What happened to Celes?"

Rebecca still maintained her calm demeanour as she looked at Oscar.

"Celes disappeared after leaving behind this message!"

After saying that, Oscar took out a piece of note paper. Rebecca took the piece of paper and quietly read its contents. Because Rebecca looked at it for a long time and didn't say anything, Eco couldn't suppress her anxiousness and peered in from the side to find out what was written. All that was casually written on the piece of paper was a single sentence.

"...[You don't have to forgive me.]? What does that mean?"

Eco pondered, while at the same time—

"...I see, so that's what's going on."

Rebecca's expression suddenly showed understanding as she murmured.

"President? What kind of clue did you gain from that information?"

Silvia stared at Rebecca. Rebecca kept her arms folded as she expressed her opinion in an objective manner.

"Mmm. A pair of pyjamas that have been taken off and a set of uniform that was left behind are in this room. Moreover, not a single item of clothing is missing from his wardrobe. Also, Celes has disappeared at the same time. It can be assumed that the disappearance of these two people is not entirely unrelated. Based solely on the message that has been left behind, Celes seems to be rather determined."

"Geez—! That's too long-winded! Just tell us the conclusion!"

Eco was anxious and couldn't help but complain impatiently.

"Then, to draw a conclusion. Just what did Ash wear when he left...we've constantly been thinking around this issue — but since we know that Ash's disappearance is related to Celes, things are a bit different."

After Rebecca revealed a smile, she placed her hand on top of Eco's head.

"I think we can be certain now that Celes forced Ash to crossdress before she led Ash away."

"—How could this be!?"

As Rebecca came to such a conclusion, Oscar's limbs went became weak, and she knelt down on the ground.

"In the end, is Celes a member of the Lafon family? Is it because she had to obey the king's orders that she had to separate Ash and Eco first...?"

Oscar murmured as if recalling something. Because of her low volume, Eco was unable to hear it. All of a sudden, Silvia stepped forward.

"Oscar-san, forgive me for saying this plainly. This afternoon will be the final battle of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout. Even if Celes has disappeared, that's not a reason for you to withdraw from the tournament. The agreement you made on that day must be upheld."

Oscar didn't say anything. After Silvia turned around to look at Rebecca, her expression appeared serious.

"President. I will be going to the seventh dragon house while it's still morning to join Lancelot so that I can prepare for the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout. Hence I will not be able to participate in the search for Ash, is that alright?"

"Yes, I don't mind. Although there is a mountain of work for the Student Council, you should concentrate of preparing for the decisive battle Silvia."

"Thank you, President. Then I'll be going first."

With no further concern, Silvia prepared to turn around to leave. Eco swiftly grabbed onto her arm.

"Hold on! Silvia, are you planning to just leave Ash behind and concentrate on

your own preparations? I never thought that you would be such a cold woman!”

Silvia narrowed her eyes at the infuriated Eco.

“Don’t be so naïve, Eco.”

“What did you say!?”

“The Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout is the most prestigious dragon riding competition of my country. Since I am participating today as the Knight Country’s Fourth Princess, I must naturally take care of all preparations. If I fight too disgracefully, I may receive ill fame for a thousand years.”

“How could this...”

“I believe that Ash will definitely return before the decisive battle begins. Ash is also an upstanding man. If he believes that his opponent has been troubled by his personal issues, it is possible that he may not be able to use his full strength out of guilt.”

“Mmm...”

Eco realised something from the sincerity in Silvia’s eyes.... Looking closely, Silvia’s fists were constantly trembling. In truth, she also wanted to search for Ash’s whereabouts. But that was not part of Silvia’s current job. As Ash’s opponent in the decisive battle, Silvia had made up her mind to do the best that she could in her own way — that was her decision. After Silvia placed her hands on top of Eco’s shoulders, she revealed a gentle expression.

“Finding Ash is your job. You must bring him back safely.”

Eco’s face suddenly turned red, and she irritably turned her head aside.

“E-Even if you don’t say it, I know!”

## Part 7

At nine o'clock in the morning, the finals of the long-distance dragon racing competition began on schedule. Not only was the arena's audience seating completely full, but the number of standing audience members was steadily increasing. The dedicated seating area for the VIPs was located in one corner of the arena. Until yesterday, there were still many vacancies in the VIP seats but they were completely full for this grand occasion today. The Chevron King Zacharias III calmly sat in the central position of the VIP seating area. Led by the First Queen, the 'Queen Group' was also in attendance surrounding the old King, making it seem as though the whole area was a completely different dimension.

"So that's the King of Chevron huh. F-For someone to sit alone amongst so many wives...how shameless!"

Sitting upon the Maestro Brigid's head as she flew a hundred metres above the arena, Eco was suddenly filled with anger. On the other hand, Eco noticed earlier that although the Paladin Oswald was also in the VIP seating area, he looked rather poor when compared to the royalty and nobility of the Chevron Kingdom. In contrast to the humble Oswald, the Third Princess Mirabel was like a diamond emitting a dazzling light. Although she was not interested in the events of the tournament as she sat there silently reading a book, even her routine book-reading mannerisms deeply attracted the attention of those around her. Like her name of the <Argento Magus>, it was as if she was shrouded in a silver light. Also, it was possible to see the Second Princess Cassandra sitting leisurely on the left side of the Paladin. In terms of presence, she and Mirabel formed a kind of balance on the left and right side. However, as the name <Diabolic Belladonna> suggested, her beauty carried a seductive quality that was the complete opposite of Mirabel. Seeing Cassandra's figure, Eco felt an inexplicable fear. By reason, the First Princess should also be present, but Veronica was busy patrolling the venue, and it looked like she had not made her way to the VIP area yet.

"...Now is not the time to be dawdling. I need to find Ash!"



Eco felt as if she had a mission of her own as she rode Brigid up high into the air.

“Haah...the thing that I need most at a time like this is Navi’s power, but that woman is...!”

Eco recalled the events that transpired not long ago, causing her anger to fire up. —It was something that happened just a few hours ago. Eco visited the Dragon Workshop to seek Navi’s assistance. She didn’t originally want to rely on Navi’s power, but it was an urgent situation. However, Navi sat in her usual chair with a dazed look, and no matter what Eco said, it was as if she wasn’t listening to her at all. Her cheeks were also dyed as red as a maiden who had fallen in love, which was extremely strange. Eco had no idea about what had happened to Navi.

*I can’t imagine a cold or fever being possible in the Dragweiss...*

“In the end, the only members of Ash’s search team are you and me. I’m counting on you.”

“Ooooooh!”

Brigid joyfully responded to Eco. Eco subconsciously pulled out the silver pocket watch from her pocket. It was too bizarre that he had forgotten to carry the silver pocket watch that was proof of being a Dragonar.... These days, Eco was always being led around by Ash who was becoming more masculine, and it had already been a long time since she had the feeling of being the master in their relationship.

“As I thought, Ash is useless without me!”

The final battle was scheduled to begin at one o’clock in the afternoon. — There were four hours until the deadline.

## Part 8

After ordering Brigid to stop in the centre of the Academy City — in the air over the centre of the Academy grounds, Eco began to concentrate. She concentrated every ounce of her consciousness into the Astral Flow that linked the two of them.

—*Kiiin...*

Worn on her right wrist, <Avalon's Bracelet> slowly began to resonate. Under Navi's strict guidance, Eco had gradually discovered the characteristics of this bracelet. This bracelet was more than just a device to control Eco's dragonisation. She felt that aside from acting as a switch between her human and dragon forms, that it also had other special abilities. Eco understood that the bracelet contained immense magical power. It seemed like Eco's ancestor — the ancient Avalon's Holy Dragons' Emperor placed their surplus magic power into it. Depending on how it was used, it seemed possible to demonstrate a variety of effects. Currently, the complex tree-like pattern of the Astral Flow was being projected in Eco's mind.

“As long as I follow the direction of the Astral Flow, I should be able to find Ash's <Seikoku>—”

However — the projection of the Astral Flow only went halfway before it suddenly disappeared.

“Haah...so it's still no good.”

Eco dropped her shoulders in frustration. The master could liberate the power of the <Seikoku> to find their lost Pal. In fact, when Eco was abducted by Angela, Ash had used his <Seikoku> to find Eco's location. But, it seemed like there was no way for a Pal to find its master through the Astral Flow. But there was also the possibility that it was simply because Eco hadn't matured enough yet. After all, knights and dragons were always together — perhaps this was the conclusion.

“Since it's come to this, I'll just have to look around everywhere.”

Eco took out a piece of paper from her pocket. It was something that Rebecca had prepared for Eco just earlier. She had gone to an arts teacher to ask for Ash — no, to ask for a portrait of Ashley. It was also painted in a very lifelike manner.

“Kuh! The more I stare, the prettier it looks...!”

Eco stared at the portrait somewhat reluctantly. In the next instant, the portrait was snatched away by the hand that swooped in from the side.

“Huh...?”

The surprised Eco hurriedly turned to look at her side.

“Oh, it’s drawn quite well. It has perfectly reproduced the charm of Ashley.”

The noble who had suddenly appeared stood straight on top of the Maestro Tristan’s head.

“Oscar!? What are you doing here?”

Eco’s eyes narrowed as she glared at Oscar, only to see Oscar reveal a seemingly lonesome smile.

“...I’ll help you out as well. After all, a master is responsible when their servant causes trouble.”

Although there were many doubts in her mind, since there was someone willing to help, Eco welcomed it with open arms. After all, she was in need of manpower to right now.

“Then, let’s head to the central plaza to ask around!”

“Understood.”

With their destination set to the central plaza, the two of them glided in the air on top of their Maestros. Simultaneously with the descent of the two Maestros, the central plaza burst into an uproar as the shrill cries of women resounded. Oscar had the appearance of a handsome and elegant noble, and it seemed as though she was just as popular even when she had left the Academy and come into the Academy City. But in the blink of an eye, Tristan had become surrounded by a group of young women.

“You see, we’re currently looking for someone. We’re looking for the student in this portrait—”

Oscar opened her mouth as she raised the portrait of Ashley in front of everyone.

“Haah.... We didn’t even end up hearing even a single eyewitness testimony.”

After the crowd dispersed, Eco disappointedly lowered her head. She buried her entire face into Brigid’s soft fur. Strictly speaking, Oscar’s strategy was not bad. But the disadvantage of it was that it only attracted young women. Moreover, they all became suspicious of the relationship between Oscar and the missing female student, and by the end it had turned into a question corner for Oscar. The situation had turned into this, and they were emptyhanded in their search for Ash.

“It can’t be helped, let’s split up and work. Eco, you keep asking for information while I go and visit each one of the places where Ash might be at.”

“Alright. Let’s meet back up in the central plaza, so tell me right away if you find out about anything.”

“This is all for the sake of my future wife Ashley, so I will do my best.”

“Who are you calling your wife~~~~~!”

Eco furiously roared, but Tristan had already flown up into the air together with Oscar.

## Part 9

In the ruins at Lake Rubina — Navi appeared next to Ash who had been drugged asleep. The hems of her gorgeous dress fluttered in the abandoned room.

“...I never imagined that such a day would actually arrive.”

Navi whispered as if in self-mockery. This body that she had constructed with magic used the same principle as to how the Mother Dragon appeared, and existed in this world. To a highly intelligent vessel of information like Navi, a physical body was unnecessary. Having said that, today’s Navi was unable to refrain from her impulses to appear in this physical form. She withheld information from Eco, and appeared alone by Ash’s side. After Navi sat down on the edge of the bed, she placed Ash’s head over her lap. Because it was rare to see him with a wig on, Navi continued to let him wear it, and didn’t take it off.

“Fufu. I never expected that you’d be so suited for crossdressing, how surprising.”

Navi muttered in a calm tone of voice as she gazed attentively at Ash’s sleeping face while her body gradually became hot. Her artificially crafted heart began to race ‘dokun dokun...’ and accelerate. Navi smiled as she stroked the cheeks of Ash’s sleeping face.

“You really are such a sinful man. For you to be able to evoke these kinds of feelings in the Dragweiss. As a result, you actually led me to refuse to help Eco...”

Navi recalled her meeting with Ash this morning in the Dragon Workshop.

—*But doesn’t that make you feel lonely?*

—*I can’t accept that! Even if the dragon race agrees, I absolutely can’t!*

—*In my eyes, Navi is also an important companion.*

—*I don’t want to lose Navi, not even a bit.*

“I was born from the Dragweiss to teach the immature Eco, and in the distant

future, I will become a part of Eco, to continue to act as her knowledge base. Although my [self] will vanish, I never had any doubts about my own destiny. But...”

Navi closed her eyes as tear droplets rolled down her cheeks from the corners of her eyes. The transparent droplets vaguely moistened Ash’s forehead.

“I’ve always wanted to be by your side—”

“Unh...”

In that instant, a faint noise came from Ash’s lips, surprising Navi.

“It can’t be...! How could he wake up so soon?”

Navi had already analysed the sleeping drug that were prepared by Celes. Because the effects of the drug would not cause harm to the human body, Navi planned on staying here alone with Ash until Eco found this place. She never considered the possibility that Ash would be able to wake up on his own.

“Kuh...uhh...”

Ash’s eyebrows quivered, and large beads of sweat streamed down his forehead. He struggled and stretched out his hand into the emptiness of the air, as if trying to grab onto a lifeline. He appeared to be struggling to resist the effects of the sleeping drug.

“What incredible willpower...”

Navi felt amazed. It seems there was much more to the Avalon Knight than just the name. She tightly grasped the hand that Ash had stretched out.

“Do your best, Ash...!”

Navi whispered encouragement into Ash’s ear. Perhaps this was the first time in her life that she had cheered someone on with such ardent passion. After a while, Ash faintly opened his eyelids.

“Eco...?”

A single word escaped from his trembling lips. When Navi’s figure was reflected in his eyes, the name that Ash called was Eco’s. In that instant, Navi understood the fact that she could not be compared to Eco, and she revealed a



lonely smile.

A shiny pink lustre flashed within his blurred vision. Despite his hazy consciousness, Ash determined it to be Eco's hair. That was why he called Eco's name.

"...How rude of you to mistake a woman's face."

However, the voice that answered was a mature voice that seemed to have a rather prickly tone. After his eyes focused, Ash's face turned red in embarrassment.

"Navi!? I-I'm sorry! When I saw the colour of your hair, I thought it was Eco..."

"I'm not particularly angry. After all, my appearance was originally a forecast of Eco's appearance once she became an adult. Since it was purely a prediction, I can't guarantee that she'll grow up to look exactly like me."

"Since you're here Navi, then that means I've come to the Dragon Workshop again...damn it, Celes actually fed me that kind of drug! Owow..."

Ash grimaced as he suddenly felt a headache. He couldn't help but press against his temple with his fingers.

"This isn't the Dragon Workshop, it's the real world."

"Eh? But Navi, your current appearance is...what's going on?"

Ash felt puzzled. Navi had once appeared in the real world. At that time, she had possessed Eco's body. But the current Navi had the same appearance as when he saw her in the Dragon Workshop. Leaving that aside, Ash realised that his head was resting on top of Navi's lap, causing him to quickly jump up.

"Oww—!"

Feeling the pain of the headache again, Ash's face contorted in pain. His limbs still felt numb. He finally climbed back up, but not long afterwards, his upper body began to sway unsteadily again.

"Don't move, and lie here okay."

Like a kind mother, Navi held Ash's head against her own chest. Ash's face was buried into the cleavage of her enormous breasts. The softness and

warmth was the same as when he had touched Navi in the Dragon Workshop. Whilst being enveloped with such a comfortable sensation, Ash's consciousness gradually began to dim.... As if singing a lullaby, Navi whispered into Ash's ear with a soft voice

“Although you're awake, the drug's effects haven't completely subsided.”

After Navi laid Ash's body down flat, she rested his head on her thighs again. Although the sensation of resting on top of Navi's thighs made Ash's heart beat erratically, he soon came back to his senses.

“Navi! Tell me what time it is right now! I have to hurry back to the Academy for the decisive battle!”

“It's impossible. Even if you drag your body along to the tournament, I'm afraid you won't even be able to ride Brigid. By the way, the time right now is fifty nine minutes past twelve.”

“Huh...?”

Ash's face was drained of its colour. He hoped that Navi was joking with him. Late participants would automatically lose their right to participate. But there was one minute until the match right now...!

“Kuh...even if I'll be late, I still have to go. I can't throw away the chance of victory in the Five Hundred Years Festival that Rebecca-san painstakingly prepared me for!”

“It's destined to be ruined the moment you're late.”

“That's right, but...”

“Let me tell you something. Originally, I could have told Eco that you were here, but I didn't do that. When Eco came to ask for my help, I...coldly refused.”

“What did you say!?”

In contrast to her indifferent tone, Navi's eyes appeared warm and moist.

“Please, Ash. Forget about the match, and just look at me, alright—”

Ash could not help but feel surprised. Was there something wrong with Navi? The usual Navi was filled with intellect, had a calm temperament, there was

always a leisurely smile on her face, and though she was occasionally a bit too mischievous — she would always rise in a timely manner to act as support for Ash and Eco during critical situations. But the present Navi was like a different person. Not only did she seem overly desperate, every one of her gestures also seemed somewhat unnatural. But, Ash didn't dislike her current appearance. In fact, he thought that she was more attractive than usual, which is why he didn't know what to do.

“Just for now, be someone that belongs only to me—”

After Navi quietly said that with a serious expression, her moist lips slowly approached Ash's face. In that instant — a flash of light shone brightly from Ash's chest.

“This light is...!”

The blinding glare forced Navi to hold out her hand to cover her eyes. Pink and silver rays of light radiated out with Ash's body as the epicentre. It was an extremely warm light. Bathed in the warm glow, Ash's headache and the numbness in his arms and legs gradually receded. With his entire body shrouded in this light, Ash climbed up from the bed. A mysterious energy was circulating around his body. It also felt rather awkward as his skirt fluttered about. After standing in front of the stunned Navi, Ash reached into his pocket. The thing that his fingers felt was — the object that even Ash forgot that he was carrying. The Bright Dragon Crystal that Eco had produced.

“Hmm...I guess I really can't beat that child.”

Navi smiled bitterly as if she had given up.

“What's happening?”

“The Bright Dragon Crystal produced by the Princess of Avalon has a special name, it's called <sup>Uranus</sup> Holy Star Stone. Uranus has a power far greater than a normal crystal. However, cases of resonance between Uranus and the master's thoughts to cause automatic activation is very rare. Seriously...it's Eco's victory.”

“Well, it's useless even if she wins. If I can't return to the Academy, then it'll count as my loss due to absence. This is bad.”

Ash was distressed. Even if the condition of his body had returned to normal, the fact that he was in a dire situation had not changed.

“Ara, don’t you have Uranus though? In that case, there’s only one way.”

“You can’t mean...!”

Ash immediately understood what Navi meant, while the question ‘Is it really possible to do this kind of thing?’ floated into his mind.

“There’s no problem because Eco is a dragon. As long as the master summons, she’ll immediately — fly across time and space.”

“...I know, I’ll give it a try.”

Ash held Uranus up high and concentrated on it. This was obviously his first experience of summoning his Pal. He recalled the time when Rebecca had summoned her Pal, and tried to follow it.

“I command you in the name of Ash Blake. Respond to my summons, Eco!”

However, the light released by Uranus gradually faded, and it finally became silent.

“...What does this mean?”

Navi shook her head and shrugged as she sighed to Ash. Seeing Navi almost back to her usual self, Ash felt happy, yet also lonely at the same time.

“That won’t work. You have to call out her full name.”

“Full name? Just [Eco] isn’t enough?”

“It doesn’t matter for other dragons if their full name isn’t used, but Eco is the Imperial Princess of Avalon’s Holy Dragons’ Emperor Family. You only have the right to decide on the first name, as the other names have strict rules. For example, the names from the second onwards must come from the names of ancestors and so on. Even her surname Avalon is only a part of the whole.”

“This is the first time I’ve heard of this...”

Ash’s face went pale. As if his last sliver of hope had disappeared, he felt a blow to his heart. Moreover, when he realised that he didn’t even know what Eco’s full name was, he felt useless.

“It can’t be helped.”

A wry smile emerged on Navi’s face, and it looked as though she were a mother looking at her naughty child. Ash suddenly remembered. Navi was the Dragweiss. Logically speaking, she was all-powerful when it came to knowledge of the dragons...!

“That’s it, you should know Eco’s full name, right Navi!?”

Asking for Navi’s help in such a situation without responding to her earlier feelings felt much too shameless. But it was an urgent situation. It was not the time to be worrying over such problems.

“...Fine. To begin with, I only brought you this trouble because I got carried away by my personal feelings, so I’ll answer to your request.”

“Thank you, Navi!”

“A-Again, it’s nothing to be grateful about...!”

Navi suddenly averted her face, and the colour of her cheeks resembled that of roses. Ash was almost captivated by Navi’s exquisite beauty and he felt a little lightheaded, but now was not the time to be getting excited over feminine appeal.

“But, before that—”

After a faint smile emerged on Navi’s face, magic was released from her fingertips. A pale blue and white light enveloped Ash’s body. The wig disappeared in the blink of an eye, and the girls’ uniform also turned into a Dragsuit.

“Amazing! My clothes have changed!”

Ash looked down at his own body. This Dragsuit felt like it was a better fit than the one designated by the Academy, and it was also lighter. It was also designed with a silver white tone that an elegant and refined appearance.

“This is a special service I’m giving you. Summoning your Pal for the first time in girls’ clothing isn’t cool at all, you know?”

“Thank you, Navi. Let’s get started then.”

The two of them stood face to face in the middle of the room. Navi reached out to touch Ash's forehead. A vast amount of knowledge immediately entered his mind. It was like a string of incantations.

"This is Eco's full name...?"

"Quickly call her over."

After Ash nodded, he lifted Uranus up high above his head again.

"I command you in the name of Ash Blake. Respond to my summons—"

Ash then called out Eco's name with mixed feelings.

"Eco Pendragon Aurora Christa Lena Angeles Iria Lorence Liliane Muires Octavia Robertine de la Rosa L'Espérance van Compostela de Avalon!"



## Part 10

The sound of the bell to announce that it was one o'clock in the afternoon rang out through the air. After Eco descended onto the Academy's rooftop with Brigid, she looked down over the campus below. Because all of the staff and students of the Academy had gone over to the arena, the campus was significantly deserted.

"Ah geez! That Ash, just where did he go!? If I remember correctly, we'll lose the right to participate if we're late, right? So Ash will lose without fighting? ... Then won't that mean Ash will have to crossdress as a woman to get married with Oscar!?"

"—You don't have to worry about that problem."

A cool voice drifted downwards as Tristan landed down next to Brigid. Standing on top of Tristan's head was Oscar.

"It's you...! I thought you'd have gone to the arena already."

"Please don't look at me so flatly. Didn't I say that a master was responsible for their servants' mistakes?"

Eco looked at Oscar with slight admiration.

"D-Don't think that I'll thank you!"

"Haha, you've not very flattering. The important point is that if both Ash and I forfeit due to absence, then victory will fall into Princess Silvia's hands. I seem to recall that the reward for her stupid victory was to be engaged with Ash?"

Eco felt as though she had suffered a blow to her mind. All of a sudden, Silvia had become her greatest obstacle, so this was an unexpected situation for Eco —

"T-Then what should I do?"

"In any case, the top priority is to find Ash. I heard some information from a staff member who stayed behind at the Academy. It seems as though Celes and Ash took a dragon carriage at the station."

“Then we have to find that coachman or else we won’t know where they went!”

“I did try looking...but once I started searching, I realised that looking for a dragon carriage that doesn’t stop moving is a rather difficult task. It seems I underestimated coachmen a bit too much.”

“You...you’re way too disappointing!”

“What about you Eco? Did you find any clues?”

“Kuh!”

Eco dishearteningly showed a dejected appearance, but anger gradually began to well up in her.

*Why is it that such misfortune only comes down on my head? Why did Navi refuse to help? Ash is also such an idiot! No matter what was going on, how could he just disappear without saying a thing!?*

Although Eco may have been wrong for sleeping so soundly, couldn’t Ash rely on his Pal just a little more.... Eco shouted into the clear autumn sky.

“ASH YOU IDIOT~~~~~!”

After Eco’s echo reverberated back a few times, silence returned again.

“Have you let off all of your steam?”

“I’m just tired...hah, hah...”

“In any case, it’s already been determined now that he’ll forfeit due to absence. Since time is no longer a factor to consider, we should perform a thorough search, what do you think?”

“That’s right. I also think that would be — kuh!”

All of a sudden, Eco felt an unfamiliar sensation, and she couldn’t stop her shoulders from trembling.

“What’s wrong?”

“I-I don’t know...but I feel strange. It feels as if my body is being pulled by a very powerful force...what is this?”

It felt as though someone was trying to pull the soul from her body. Eco could not help but felt uneasy as she had no idea what kind of strange phenomenon was happening to her own body. And after a while, the sound of someone else's voice seemed to ring out in her mind.

—...*I command you. Respond to my summons...*

“This voice! Could it be Ash!? Ash, is it you!?”

Eco looked up and around in every direction.

—*Eco Pendragon Aurora Christa Lena Angeles...*

Ash's voice continued to resound. He seemed to be reciting some kind of incantation.

“Ash! Where are you!? What are you saying!?”

At that moment, Tristan roared out and turned towards the north. Eco and Oscar also followed suit to look at the sky in the north. Located at the far northern horizon was the vast Fianna Forest. Eco could see a column of light rising into the sky.

“That light is...!”

Upon hearing Eco's low whispers, Oscar tilted her head in confusion.

“I can't see anything...right! Could it be that this is something that only dragons can see?”

As if to affirm Oscar's speculation, Tristan let out another roar. Ash's voice continued to ring out in Eco's mind.

—...*de la Rosa L'Espérance...*

Hearing Ash's voice that seemed like an incantation, Eco began to feel extremely anxious.

“No...it's like my body is being pulled away! What's happening to my body!?”

*I really want to fly over to Ash's side as soon as I can.*

*I really want to protect Ash.*

*I really want to stay by Ash's side.*

*I really want to embrace Ash tightly.*

All of these thoughts circulated within Eco's mind.

"Don't resist, Eco. Open your heart and accept these feelings."

As if to cheer Eco on, Oscar placed her hand on top of her head.

"Ash is calling for you right now."

Eco stared at Oscar's face with disbelief. Dragons summoned by their masters would always appear across space — Eco had personally witnessed this phenomenon several times. In fact, she had always been envious of the other dragons who could traverse space to appear beside their masters. However, she never believed that it was possible for her as a dragon with a human appearance. As time passed, she even gave up on this idea.

"Ash? Are you really calling for me...?"

Eco muttered to herself with overflowing emotions. As if to respond to Eco's words, Ash spoke the last part in a single breath—

*—van Compostela de Avalon!*

Eco felt a force of attraction that was even greater than before. Before she realised, a gate transcending time and space had appeared in front of her. Because Oscar did not seem to show any particular response, it was likely that this gate could only be seen by dragons.

"Go, Eco."

Oscar smiled so with a smile. An endless darkness lay on the other side of the gate. Although the terrifying appearance scared Eco a bit, she immediately overcame her fear.

"Thank you, Oscar. I have to go!"

After Eco made up her mind, she clung onto Brigid's head.

"You too, Brigid!"

As Brigid let out a roar, it leapt through the gate.

## Part 11

The entire wall of the ruin was blown apart along with the sound of a violent explosion.

“W-What happened...?”

Grey dust filled the air, obstructing Ash’s vision.

“Ash!”

A nostalgic voice broke through the grey veil, and made its way to Ash’s ears. Eco ecstatically rushed over. With a ‘pon’ sound, she buried her face into Ash’s arms.

“Eco? Is it really Eco!?”

It was almost like a dream. Following Ash’s call, Eco had traversed the space between them.

“Idiot idiot idiot! You made me so worried!”

Eco cried as she pounded against Ash’s chest with her fists.

“I’m sorry, Eco.”

Ash used all the strength in his body to tightly embrace that delicate body. Eco also brought her arms around his back to hug him tightly.

“—Ahem. Sorry to interrupt your touching reunion, but weren’t you in a hurry to get to the arena?”

Behind Ash, Navi spoke up. A bitter smile emerged on her face as she looked at Ash and Eco embracing each other. Upon hearing that, Eco suddenly showed a tempestuous expression.

“Navi!? Why are you here!? And why do you have a body!?”

“Well, I wonder why?”

After Navi replied with an innocent tone, she curled her hair through her fingers in circles.

“You two...couldn’t have been hiding here doing some shameless things right...!?”

Eco rapidly burst into a fit of anger.

“You’re overthinking things. If I didn’t have Navi’s help, I wouldn’t have been able to summon you Eco.”

Ash was flustered. Even though he didn’t tell a single lie, as soon as he recalled how Navi confessed to him, he was unable to calm down.

“I-In any case, even if I forfeit due to absence, we should still show ourselves at the arena. Since we’ve troubled the President and the guests, we should properly apologise to them.”

“Oooooooooooooohh...!”

Brigid also seemed to be in agreement with Ash’s opinion. After letting out a mighty roar, it moved its body away from the half-destroyed house. And then, it ascended into the majestic blue sky while carrying Ash and Eco on top of its back—.

“The First Summon *A.S.B. 1365.10*” is closed.



# Chapter 5 - The Fight of the Sacred Knights

## Part 1

The spectators who filled the arena were all growing impatient. The one o'clock afternoon bell had already rung, but the decisive battle of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout had yet to begin. The dissatisfaction of the audience members turned into jeers and was audible even in the contestants' lounge. Silvia folded her arms in front of her chest as she paced back and forth in the room. According to the rules of the match, since neither Ash nor Oscar had arrived in time for the beginning of the match, it counted as a forfeit.

"Seriously...what are Ash and Oscar doing? If this goes on, won't I win without fighting...? If that's truly the case, then Ash and I w-w-will b-be engaged—"

"Princess-sama, please stay calm."

Cosette spoke up to soothe the embarrassed Silvia. But she had a grin on her face to indicate that she found Silvia's shy expression rather interesting.

"Come now. Is there anything to be happy about in a victory that comes without fighting?"

Rebecca quietly stepped into the lounge.

"T-That's...!"

Silvia felt so ashamed that she was unable to lift her head.

"Let's put that topic aside. Did you hear the one o'clock bell? The only member of the final battle who can appear is you. Under circumstances where your opponents are absent, victory is something that belongs to you—"

"I can't accept it! President, I certainly don't think that you enjoy seeing this result either, right?"

Seeing Silvia's response, Rebecca showed an understanding smile.

"I knew you would say that. I still have a trump card though."

“...Trump card?”

Silvia had a confused expression.

“It’s actually quite simple. We simply have to delay the time of the match to make it so that those two aren’t late, right?”

“Y-You have a way to do that?”

“Of course, there’s no problem with arranging that. I just need you to lend me a hand. Are you willing to do me a favour?”

“Absolutely! If it’s within my power, then just say the word!”

“I’m relieved to hear you say that, Silvia.”

After a strangely gentle smile emerged on Rebecca’s face, she rested her hands on top of Silvia’s shoulders. Silvia was inexplicably filled with a sense of foreboding.

## Part 2

Wearing a long robe that appeared to resemble a wizard's robe, the masked Celes discreetly slipped into a clock tower that was close to the arena.

Originally, the clock tower was a building that could only be entered by civic staff and the clock craftsmen, but with Celes' level of skill, infiltrating from the sealed back entrance was a piece of cake. The Five Hundred Years Festival was incredibly lively right now, so it was unlikely that anyone else would barge in.

"...How strange. The time has already passed, yet the match has not begun, and I can't see Tristan either. Oscar has to take part in the final battle for that person's plan to succeed...what is she doing!?"

Celes looked down from the top of the clock tower as she grumbled. From this position, it was possible to capture the entire view of the large arena in one's eye. The entry and exit for the contestants was a waiting area dedicated to dragons, but somehow only Lancelot was there. Because Ash had been kidnapped and confined, Brigid's absence was only to be expected, but the real problem was why even Tristan had disappeared. At that time, Rebecca gracefully stepped into the arena.

## Part 3

After Rebecca stood in the centre of the arena, she held up a magic-powered loudspeaker.

[Sorry for the wait. The final battle of the Dragonar's Gunnar Bout will soon begin.]

An enormous wave of cheers was instantly set off in the arena.

[However, before the match begins — Princess Silvia Lautreamont has expressed her hopes to hold an oath taking ceremony.]

Another grand wave of cheers was set off in the arena.

“What is she saying!? She wants me to take an oath on behalf of the players in front of a full audience...!”

After grasping the situation, Silvia could not stop her knees from shaking. Within the passageway connecting the arena and the lounge room—. Obeying Rebecca's instructions, Silvia stood there to wait, but she had never imagined that she was waiting for something like this. The metallic portion of her Dragsuit clattered as if emphasizing the shakiness of her body. *I should just turn tail and head back into the lounge room* — Silvia thought to herself.

“I'm really looking forward to Princess-sama's speech...fufufu.”

From behind, Cosette appeared to be cheering Silvia on rather gleefully.

[Now then, please welcome Princess Silvia!]

After Rebecca announced that in a vibrant tone, she sneakily sent a wink towards Silvia in the players' entrance passageway.

“I must be having a nightmare...”

As Silvia tearfully muttered to herself, Lancelot stretched its neck over from the waiting area next to the passageway and stared at Silvia with its round eyes.

“Lancelot? ...Are you encouraging me?”

Lancelot's throat purred as it let out a small hum. Silvia felt deeply moved by

the fact that it seemed to be saying ‘I’m by your side’.

“Thank you, Lancelot!”

After Silvia brightened up, she leapt up onto Lancelot’s saddle. She gripped the reins in her hand as she moved towards the centre of the arena. Silvia’s heroic appearance as she rode atop her silver dragon sparked excitement in the audience. Passionate cheers, thunderous applause, and flower petals flew about. After arriving in front of Rebecca who stood in the centre of the arena, Silvia gently pulled on the reins to signal Lancelot to stop.

“Do you need this?”

Silvia shook her head and rejected the magic-powered loudspeaker that Rebecca handed her.

“Listen closely, Silvia. Your goal is to stall for time. Until Ash and Oscar arrive, stall for as long as you can.”

“I know.”

After Silvia nodded and replied, she took a deep breath. She raised her right hand as she rode on top of Lancelot.

“I swear on behalf of the contestants! I, Silvia Lautreamont vow to uphold the spirit of a knight’s chivalry to take part in the traditional tournament of my country in a fair and honest manner, the finals of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout!”

*Good, I’ve done pretty well so far* — but after feeling somewhat happy for a moment, Silvia immediately fell into disarray. She was unable to force the remaining words from her mouth.

“It is simply impossible to use a contestant to stall for time...”

And now, Silvia realised that reality was not as simple as she had imagined. She had absolutely no clue about what to say next. Silvia looked depressed as she lowered her head. After a while, the audience members in the arena began to feel puzzled. The venue began to become noisy as everyone talked amongst themselves. At that time, Cosette, who had unsuspectingly appeared beside Lancelot at some point whispered to Silvia

“Princess-sama, there is no need to say anything that is too stereotypical. You

can honestly express your own feelings in your own way.”

“Cosette...?”

“There is no need to be nervous. You’ll definitely be fine, Princess-sama.”

After Silvia nodded in response to Cosette, she lifted her face and stood proudly once again. There was no longer any confusion in her heart.

“My apologies, please allow me to take this occasion to talk about my private affairs...in truth, there is someone that I like!”

Sure enough, those words triggered uproar within the arena.

“A-At the beginning, I was the same as everyone else, and I absolutely disdained him because he was regarded as the Academy’s Number One Problem Child. I never wanted to understand him; I simply followed the preordained stereotype that he was a problem student. However...he helped and encouraged my ignorant self, time and time again. I have learned a lot from him, and before I knew it, the share of my heart that he held grew larger and larger...finally, I finally realised the feelings that had germinated within my heart.”

The audience members were completely silent right now. Everyone had pricked their ears up to carefully listen to Silvia’s declaration.

“I-I must alter the contestants’ oath. I hereby declare that if I am the victor in this Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout—...I-I will propose to him!”

After a few seconds of silence, the sentiments of the audience members flooded down like a tidal wave. Even so, Silvia seemed unaffected as she bowed deeply one time. When she lifted her face back up again, an endless blue sky extended out before her eyes. The amazing thing was that she didn’t feel any regret, and she no longer felt any embarrassment either. Her mood was as bright and cheerful as the sky that stretched over her head. Silvia inadvertently noticed that there was an object emitting light in a corner of the sky.

“That is...!”

In that instant, two Dragonars flew towards the arena like shooting stars.

“Oscar Brailsford has arrived!”



Oscar, who landed on Silvia's right hand side shouted out with an ostentatious tone. Oscar was clad in a golden Ark, while she held the magical bow Failnaught in her hands. Following that, the one who landed on Silvia's left hand side was—

“Sorry for the late arrival, I am Ash Blake!”

Riding on top of Brigid's head with a heroic glow, Ash was wearing a silver Dragsuit that Silvia had never seen before. He also had the holy sword Excalibur, and based on this, it was evident that he was already wearing the Ark that Eco had created on top of his Dragsuit. The <Seikoku> engraved on his left arm had also grown larger, and even reached up to his face. His <Seikoku> had expanded to cover his entire body. As soon as she saw Ash's heroic figure, Silvia immediately felt her heart race.

“And don't forget about me either!”

Eco naturally stood by Ash's side. Silvia momentarily felt a kind of prick at her heart, but—

“All three of you are too slow!”

She showed a relieved expression as she snapped at her opponents.

## Part 4

Before the match began, Silvia moved Lancelot closer to Brigid's side.

"Er, umm...did you hear the contestants' oath earlier?"

Ash looked surprised.

"Ah, yeah...because it would've been impolite to barge in halfway through the speech...I heard everything."

Ash embarrassedly replied. When Ash replied to her, Silvia's face also turned red.



“Hey...? How long are you two going to keep flirting for?”

*Gogogogogo...*a rather potent negative aura of radiated out from Eco.

“—Now, let the final round of the Dragonar’s Gunnar Bout begin!”

And then, the teacher serving as the referee announced the opening with a dignified tone. Deafening cheers echoed across the arena. After Ash came back to his senses, he turned his gaze towards Oscar who stood directly in front of him. Silvia took hold of the reins and said to Ash

“Ash, let us work together to defeat Oscar-san first. After that, we can fight one-on-one with no distractions.”

“Understood, Princess-sama.”

After agreeing with Silvia’s proposal, Ash pulled the holy sword Excalibur out from its scabbard. In a three-way battle, such agreements were rather natural. Because the rules did not forbid it, there was no problem in doing so. It was because negotiation techniques were also an element of the match.

“Hmm~...”

Although Eco seemed somewhat dissatisfied about the decision to join forces with Silvia, she was probably aware that this was the most efficient way of fighting. That was why she only muttered a few words to herself in a low voice and didn’t voice any objections.

“I’ll pin Oscar-san down, Ash, you use that opportunity to attack!”

Listening to Silvia’s instructions, Lancelot swiftly flew above Tristan’s head and unleashed a <sup>Crimson Ex-Breath</sup> Crimson Breath of the Fire Dragon with astonishing momentum. Surprisingly, Oscar showed no intentions of evading, and didn’t even prepare any defensive measures. On top of that, she didn’t even look at Lancelot.

—*Dooooooooon!*

“What!? They actually took a direct hit...”

Holding Excalibur up, Ash originally wanted to pursue a swift victory, but he immediately halted Brigid’s movements upon evaluating the situation. Tristan’s position was enveloped by a hazy grey smog. No matter how strong Oscar was,

she couldn't possibly remain unharmed after enduring such a powerful assault. Up in the air, Silvia's expression also appeared confused.

"You idiot! Why wouldn't you dodge!?"

Silvia had originally attacked based on the assumption that Oscar would 'dodge'. Ash was then responsible for ambushing Oscar.

"—Hmph, I have an Ark protecting me. There is no need for me to dodge such feeble attacks."

A cold voice suddenly rang out from the cloud of smoke that still remained in the air.

"...I'm afraid that I still have to go find Celes afterwards. I'll end this trifling match immediately."

Ash suddenly had an ominous premonition as a chill radiated through his entire body. He suddenly yelled towards Silvia

"Watch out! Princess-sama!"

"You shall personally taste the power of my magic bow Failnaught!"

In an instant, the smoke surrounding Oscar and Tristan was dispersed, and a countless number of arrows were released from there.

—*The unflowing magic bow — Failnaught.*

Like Rebecca's magic spear Gáe Bolg, they were both weapons that interfered with fate. Ash realised the reason why he felt so terrified. It was because he had been locked onto by the magic bow. While Oscar endured that attack, she had already completed preparations for a counterattack.

"Fly, Brigid!"

Under Ash's command, Brigid flew up high. While dodging the incoming barrage of arrows, they continued to climb higher into the air. The sight of such superb flying technique caused the audience members to brim with enthusiasm. Numerous arrows still chased after Brigid's back, stubbornly in hot pursuit.

"Ash, what should we do!? If this continues, then sooner or later we'll be hit!"

Eco's face turned pale as she grabbed on tightly to Ash's waist. Ash was acting unexpectedly calm right now.

*—I see, so this is all thanks to Rebecca-san as well.*

Ash recalled the events of the preliminary round. At that time, Rebecca had trained Ash by using an attack pattern that imitated Oscar's. The results of that training were amazing as Ash didn't feel the least bit threatened despite all of the ranged attacks raining down on him. Ash's confidence also infected Brigid.

"Uooooooooooooohhh...!"

Brigid expressed its high spirits and drew out a beautiful trajectory in the air as it contested with the arrows. As for the arrows that couldn't be dodged, Ash cut them down with Excalibur. Even if they were fated to hit by the magic bow, as long as he had the legendary sword of Avalon's Holy Dragons' Emperor Family in his hand, he had enough strength to go against the curse of the magic bow.

*—As long as I have this sword, defeating Oscar will not be a problem...!*

Ash was overflowing with self-confidence, and didn't believe it possible for him to face defeat.

"Good, Brigid! Go behind Tristan like this—"

"Kyaa...!"

At that time, Silvia's cry entered his ears, causing Ash to shudder. He quickly turned to look in the direction that the cry came from—

"Princess-sama!?"

Lancelot had taken several hits and appeared rather unsteady. Although Silvia was unharmed and still held the reins in her hand, perhaps because of the firepower and destructive force of the arrows, Lancelot had probably lost its normal ability to reason already.

"Crap...!"

Ash came to the realisation that he had made a mistake. Because he was still able to fight, he mistakenly believed that it was possible for Silvia to handle Oscar's offensive as well. After all, Silvia was a talented honour student in their

grade. In reality, Ash, who had been trained by Rebecca and was armed with the holy sword Excalibur held an overwhelming advantage due to the large difference in experience and equipment compared to Silvia.

“Princess-samaaaaa—!”

“Wait, what are you doing!?”

Ash ignored Eco’s cries to stop, and insisted on making Brigid glide across. In an instant, Brigid had made it over to Lancelot’s side. At the same time that Brigid initiated defensive magic — a Hexagonal Shield, he used his holy sword to deflect the remaining arrows. Loud explosions erupted next to their ears one after the other.

“Kyaaaaahh!”

Both Eco and Silvia screamed into his ears. It was fine for Eco who stood behind him, but for even Silvia to shriek aloud, was that not detrimental to her reputation as a Dragonar?

“Princess-sama, please calm down! Leave the arrows to me, please use a long-distance attack, Princess-sama—”

All of a sudden, Ash felt an enormous magical reaction, so he looked up into the air. Without any of them noticing, Tristan had flown up to a distance of around fifty metres above the ground. The atmosphere surrounding Tristan had become distorted. It was possible that the accumulated magical energy was so vast that it had generated such an effect on the surrounding space. Ash shuddered as a cold chill ran down his spine. Oscar stood on top of Tristan’s head, arrogantly looking down on Ash and the others.

“<sup>Stormy Blue Leviathan Impact</sup> Stormy Blue Devastation of the Sea Dragon!”

Under Oscar’s orders, Tristan activated its magic. Since Tristan was the one to activate the magic, there was no particular need for Oscar to call out the name of the spell, but perhaps that was just Oscar’s way of doing things. Ash had never heard of such magic. It was highly possible that it was advanced magic that only appeared in upper-level textbooks. A swirling torrent of water as fast-flowing as a river came crashing down towards Ash and the others. If they took a direct hit, both rider and dragon would be swallowed whole...!



“Freeze it, Brigid!”

Ash shouted. Brigid quickly responded by activating <sup>Azul Ex-Blizzard</sup>  
Frozen Fang of the Blue Ice Dragon.

“You too please, Princess-sama!”

“I know! Lancelot, you help out as well!”

Silvia finally seemed to have regained her fighting spirit. Perhaps satisfied about its master’s return, Lancelot fired out a powerful Azul Ex-Blizzard. The Stormy Blue Leviathan Impact and the two Azul Ex-Blizzards clashed in mid-air. The two ice blasts continually rushed forward, causing the powerful blast of water to completely solidify. But the torrent of water didn’t seem like it was defeated just yet.

“In that case, I’ll just have to use Excalibur—”

“You’re still too naïve, Ash!”

The moment that Ash grabbed the hilt of his sword, Oscar immediately resumed her flurry of arrows.

“Shit...!”

Being trapped by the opponent’s magical attacks, both Brigid and Lancelot were stuck in the air, and they stumbled even deeper into a dilemma. Even if they wanted to halt their magic to evade the onslaught of arrows, there was no guarantee that they wouldn’t be swallowed by the torrent of water the instant that they stopped their magic. Ash swung the holy sword back and forth. With that, he was able take down the arrows that came flying towards them one by one. While Lancelot was focused on using its offensive magic, it meant that Silvia had become completely defenceless. Hence, Ash also helped to ward off the arrows that targeted Silvia.

“Damn it, what should I do...!”

“You don’t have to keep guarding me! Our levels are simply too far apart...!”

Silvia showed a depressed and dejected look.

“Princess-sama, what are you talking about!? This doesn’t suit you at all! Was that players’ oath just a farce with nothing behind it?”

Ash scolded her as he slashed away at the incoming barrage. Only after blurting that out did Ash clearly remember what Silvia had said in her declaration, causing his face to go red.

“Ash...”

Most likely because Silvia also recalled the topic of her proposal, she could not help but blush. Ash and Silvia naturally gazed upon each other with affection.

“You two! Do you even know what kind of situation you’re in right now!?”

Seeing this, Eco could not help but raise her fists in protest.

“Oh dear...we’re in the middle of a battle right now.”

Oscar looked down at the trio with a fearless smile.

“I won’t show any more mercy —<sup>Copper Red Lava Flow</sup>

Copper Red Blast of the Scorching Dragon!”

As soon as Oscar declared that, a magic circle appeared in front of Tristan’s head. A copper-red coloured torrent rushed down from above like a waterfall. Not only did it nullify the effect of the ice magic, it also accelerated downwards due the force of gravity. The torrent of water that had once been halted by the ice magic flowed downwards once more. And then — the red and blue torrents combined as they swirled together to form a double helix.

“Using two types of advanced magic at the same time...this can’t be possible!”

Upon seeing Tristan reveal such an unusual skill with her own eyes, Silvia was left speechless. Although Ash was also shocked, he soon recovered. Even if this was a tournament, enduring this kind of attack could even be life-threatening.

“Brigid, concentrate all your magical energy on defensive magic! Eco, inject your magical energy into Brigid! Lancelot, push the firepower of Azul Ex-Breath to the maximum!”

Originally, Ash didn’t have the right to give orders to Lancelot, but Lancelot seemed to have noticed Ash’s intentions, and it increased its output for Azul Ex-Breath. Brigid used this opportunity to stop casting Azul Ex-Breath, and instead concentrated all of its energy into a Hexagonal Shield.

“I’m going to start, Brigid. Take my magic!”

Following that, Eco concentrated and sent her magic into Brigid’s body. Brigid cried out sharply, and gradually stacked the Hexagonal Shield with two, and then three layers.

“It’s coming! Be careful—”

Without letting Ash finish, the red and blue double helix approached the three of them directly! In an instant, a tremendous impact occurred at the Hexagonal Shield that had now been stacked five layers thick—. An ear-splitting loud bang was accompanied by an intense flash of light. The unimaginable impact rocked his head, and Ash’s vision suddenly became dark.

## Part 5

“...Am I still alive?”

When Silvia opened her eyes, she found herself clinging onto Lancelot's back, and she realised that they had been pushed down into a corner of the arena. A buzzing sound echoed through her entire head as a throbbing headache attacked her. Although her entire body ached, it seemed as though she had no broken bones. Her Dragsuit had also only sustained minor damage. Lancelot had suffered some minor injuries, but it still seemed capable of moving normally. As proof that it hadn't yet lost its will to fight, it let out a low roar. The entire venue had become silent. The atmosphere had been so lively, so what had happened? Silvia felt uneasy.

“That's right! Where is Ash!?”

After Silvia scanned her surroundings, she trembled in fear. Ash lay flat on Brigid's body. His Dragsuit was heavily damaged, and blood oozed out of his wounds. He lay there quiet and motionless as he had obviously lost consciousness. There was no trace of the holy sword Excalibur anywhere. She was afraid that the invisible Ark that Eco bestowed upon him had disappeared as well. Even the <Seikoku> that had spread across his entire body had returned to normal. Eco lay on top of Brigid's tail with a pained expression on her face. Although she was conscious, she was probably still unable to grasp the current situation. The fortune amidst the misfortune was that her body did not appear to have any obvious injuries.

“Grooo...uhh...”

Brigid had also just barely managed to maintain its consciousness, but its silver fur was contaminated with blood, and its right forelimb appeared to have been fractured. Its left wing also seemed to have signs of bleeding. On the other hand, Oscar had taken Tristan up to a high altitude as she overlooked the arena calmly.

“It looks like victory has been decided. I should go and find Celes—”

At that moment, an abnormality occurred with Brigid's body. Its body emitted a hazy glow, and gradually reduced in size. Its silver fur and majestic wings also disappeared. Finally, it reverted back to its original appearance of an Asia that resembled a large lizard. Almost certainly because it had been overwhelmed, it could no longer maintain a connection with Eco. Even though it had reverted to being an Asia, Brigid still did not allow Ash to fall onto the ground. In the event of a three-way battle, being knocked out would not initiate a countdown, so Ash had technically not been defeated yet. But since he had lost consciousness, he was unable to fight again.

"Princess Silvia, the winner has already been decided. As a Princess of the Knight Country, and as an honourable Dragonar, you should admit defeat."

There was no pleasure in Oscar's expression as she rode Tristan while it descended towards the ground. It looked like she had already lost interest in the tournament. The current Oscar seemed to be preoccupied with worry for Celes.

"Kuh! What should I do..."

Silvia clenched her teeth.

## Part 6

“...It’s time.”

In the clock tower, Celes quietly muttered to herself. Tristan’s offensive magic had caused both Ash and Brigid to sustain serious injuries. The only reason why Silvia was able to escape unharmed with only slight superficial wounds was all thanks to Ash who had risked his life to block the double helix of red and blue. Ash looked like he would no longer be able to fight. Even if he regained consciousness, he had lost his two trump cards of the Ark and the holy sword Excalibur. Moreover, Eco had exhausted a vast amount of magical energy, so it was probably impossible for her to bestow the Ark again in such a short period of time. Even Brigid which had once transformed into a Maestro had reverted to being nothing more than an ordinary Asia. All that remained was for Oscar to defeat Silvia, and then the final battle would be declared as over, but—

“I’m sorry...Oscar. I cannot betray that person...”

After Celes said that with a weak voice, she removed the mask from her face. She then removed her eye patch. Celes extended her fingertips out to stroke her rarely-exposed left eye. The eyeball felt abnormally hard. Celes’ left eye was embedded with a black crystal. It seemed to be exactly the same thing as the large crystal that was present on Tristan’s forehead. And that was because the black crystal embedded on Tristan’s forehead was originally a magic crystal created by Celes’ magic eye.

“I am a descendant of <Pluto’s Children>...hmm, what a disgusting bloodline.”

Celes derided herself almost unconsciously. This so-called Pluto was a kind of parasitic black crystal. According to ancient records, it was said to be a magic crystal that was developed by Nehalennia’s Dark Dragons’ King Family. Accumulating human hatred, jealousy and sorrow — these negative emotions were said to be able to produce a strong effect. Once the so-called <Pluto’s Children> line was born, Pluto was embedded into their eyes. Moreover, they were able to manipulate dragons from the outside by embedding large crystals into a dragon’s body.

“My life was derailed because of this magic eye—”

“I see, so you’re the holder of Pluto.”

The cold and clear voice that came from behind greatly startled Celes. Turning back with a bloodthirsty gaze, she saw that the Academy headmistress, Princess Mirabel and her personal maid Eunice had appeared in the clock tower.

“Wha...! Why have you come to this place!?”

“Just by making a hypothesis — if I was the holder of Pluto, I thought about where I would hide and watch...a few locations were naturally narrowed down.”

Mirabel answered modestly as if she was lecturing a student.

“Kuh! No, how do you know about the existence of Pluto anyway!?”

“Ara...didn’t you hear how I once studied at the university in the Holy Espada Agency?”

“I’ve heard that it’s a gathering of extraordinary geniuses...and that every institute is involved in leading research on science and technology more advanced than the present day by a hundred years.”

“That’s just an outsider’s prejudice. That place is nothing more than a very ordinary research facility. However, it is very easy to run into a student capable of designing a magic ship on the street there.”

“Design a magic ship!? You sure make it sound easy...”

*Speaking of which, the designer of the magic ship Silvanus was Mirabel, Celes thought. When Mirabel took on the role of headmistress, Celes had done some research on her background.*

“Ever since I saw that black crystal on Tristan’s forehead, a feeling of déjà vu kept lingering in my mind...I’ve finally remembered now, so I feel a bit happier.”

As if she had finally coughed up the bone fragment that was stuck in her throat, Mirabel’s expression looked rather cheerful.

“Congratulations, Princess-sama.”

Eunice congratulated Mirabel with somewhat strange timing.

“...Hmph. It seems as though the <Argento Magus> lives up to her name. But



—”

Celes swiftly pulled out a hidden dagger from her pocket, and charged straight towards Mirabel.

—*Kiin!*

At lightning speed, Mirabel pulled out a rapier from a dining trolley and traced out a silver arc. Blue sparks scattered about. While Celes blocked Mirabel’s rapier, she took a glance at Eunice.

“Hey hey...the master was actually the first to draw their sword? Isn’t that girl a member of the Shelley family just like Cosette?”

With an indifferent expression, Eunice stood squarely behind Mirabel.

“Eunice is a parentless orphan. Through the Shelley family’s selection tests, she was chosen to become their adopted daughter.”

Hearing the words ‘adopted daughter’, Celes felt irritated. The Shelley family was just like the Lafon family in the respect that they adopted orphans to account for their lack of personnel.

“So her situation is similar to mine...but, to be fortunate enough to take on a special job as a royal princess’ personal maid yet not protect their master...how can you call yourself a woman of the Shelley family!?”

Celes menacingly attempted to send a kick towards Mirabel’s abdomen. At the same time, Mirabel leapt upwards skilfully and landed next to Eunice. She then put her arm around Eunice’s waist.

“I chose Eunice as my personal maid — precisely because the black tea that she brews is the most delicious in the world.”

“Ah, Princess-sama, you praise me too much, I cannot accept it...”

Eunice blushed as tears of joy streamed down from her eyes.

“Enough, I’ve heard enough to make my skin itch! Even if you are a Princess, I won’t show any mercy if you get in my way!”

“I don’t care. I have the ability to protect myself.”

After Mirabel stood in front of Eunice, she calmly raised her rapier. The sharp

tip shone with silver light. Celes then realised something.

“Kuh...I see. The ‘silver light’ of the < <sup>Argento Magus</sup> Wise Maiden of Silver Light> is not a reference to your silver hair, but that rapier!”

“My swordsmanship has been recognised and I was employed as an instructor for the current Pope, Raquel IV. Are you prepared for this?”

An astonishing fighting spirit was emitted from her. That spirit far surpassed that of the instructors of the Lafon family who trained Celes in the past.

“S-Such incredible fighting spirit...!”

Celes had completely misread the person known as Mirabel Lautreamont. For people who had accumulated a lot of battle experience like Celes, a single exchange of strikes was enough to see the strength of her opponent. Mirabel was not an opponent that she could defeat with a small dagger. Celes’ instincts were ringing with alarm bells.

“I surrender, hurry up and kill me.”

After Celes tossed the dagger aside, she sat cross-legged on the spot. If she allowed Mirabel to kill her right now, then there would be no need to betray Oscar. To Celes, this was the best option. However, Mirabel’s response was beyond her expectations.

“Oh, why would I do that? I’m rather interested in what you were about to do. Come on, hurry up and follow your original plan.”

The unexpected words left Celes speechless.

“I specialise in the study of holy relics. As for you, you’re a living and breathing holy relic. There isn’t a better research subject than you.”

“Are you serious...?”

“Alright, stand up. You’re called Celestina Lafon, right?”

“...Are you aware how much sacrifice my plan will cause? All you have to do is swing down the rapier in your hand to avoid a tragedy from occurring.”

“If anything bad were truly to happen, Ash, Eco, Silvia and Rebecca will find a way to deal with it. Moreover, Veronica-anesama and her personal guard led by

Captain Glenn are also present.”

“Tsk. So there’s a terrible princess behind that lovely face...”

After Celes stood up from the ground, she turned her back to Mirabel. The arena was in a distant location. Celes made up her mind.

“...I am a descendant of <Pluto’s Children>, Celestina Lafon. The Pluto bestowed to the Maestro Tristan, listen to my orders...”

“The Three-way Fight!!! *A.S.B.1365.10*” is closed.

# Chapter 6 - The Birth of a Demon

## Part 1

Without any warning, Tristan let out an earth-shattering roar.

“Gooooooooooooooooooooooooohhh...!”

It was a noise far surpassing a normal roar, and even Silvia couldn't help but cover her ears. A deep black aura radiated out from the black crystal on Tristan's forehead.

“W-What's going on...?”

Silvia murmured in astonishment. Just a second earlier — Oscar was ready to give Silvia a fatal blow. Although she had luckily escaped from the fate of defeat, the situation was far too abnormal.

“...W-What's wrong, Tristan?”

For the first time since the beginning of the decisive battle, Oscar's expression showed signs of doubt. It seemed as though even Oscar was unable to comprehend what had happened to Tristan. It seemed as though Tristan had gone berserk.

“Grrrrr...!”

Lancelot became cautious and retreated backwards step by step. These actions were not an order from Silvia. It was an instinctive perception of danger, and it naturally tried to maintain a distance.

“Be careful! There's something strange about Tristan!”

After she finally stood back up, Eco gave a warning to Silvia. The audience members in the arena also noticed the strange atmosphere, and they began to talk amongst themselves. The light released by the black crystal on Tristan's forehead grew in intensity. No, rather than light, it was more correct to describe it as a dark aura.

“Gooooooooooooooooooooooooohhh ...!”

Tristan was unable to withstand the apparent torture and it rolled over the ground in pain. A black aura gradually began to envelop its enormous body.

“Kuh! Calm down, Tristan! What’s the problem!?”

Even as strong as Oscar was, she had to hold on tight to Tristan’s fur in case she was thrown off at any moment.

“Is this something that Celes did!? Celes! Where did you go?”

The silver fur that was unique to a Maestro slowly began to turn black. Clouds also appeared in the sky that was previously clear. The sound of thunder could be heard from afar. At the same time that the sky above Ansarivan was covered by dark clouds, Tristan was reborn as a jet-black dragon.

“Gooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhh!”

A deafening roar shook the very air.

“This can’t be! This is my Tristan! What’s going on — kuh!”

In an instant, even Oscar began to feel pain. An ominous premonition spontaneously made Silvia feel a chill run down her spine.

“What is it!? Calm down Oscar-san! Hold on!”

No matter what Silvia said, Oscar ignored it as she continued to hold her head and struggle in pain.

“No! I don’t want to do that! Stop it! Don’t invade my body! ...  
Uooooooooohhh!”

A shrill scream lingered throughout the venue with a long echo.

“Oscar-san...!?”

Silvia’s face was coloured with surprise. Something strange began to happen to the Ark that Oscar was so proud of. Its brilliant golden colour was swallowed by a terrible black erosion. Each part of the armour also distorted into an eerie form. The shapes were similar to that of a reptilian creature. The magic bow Failnaught also followed suit with the Ark as its colour and appearance changed. In the blink of an eye, the golden Dragonar had turned into a black

demon.

“Kuku...what an extraordinary feeling. So this is the power of Pluto!”

Oscar revealed a smile so terrifying that it almost seemed as though she had become another person entirely. Could it be that Tristan’s transformation had also caused Oscar’s personality to change? And what was this ‘Pluto’ that she spoke of?

“What is happening!?”

The scene that had occurred before her eyes was beyond Silvia’s ability to understand, and all she could do was stare.

“Come now, Child of Pluto! State your wish!”

The demon Oscar yelled out towards the grey sky. As if in response to her question, the black crystal stuck onto Tristan’s forehead released a wicked black glow.

“Is that so...is that your wish? Very well.”

After the demon Oscar seemed to express her understanding, she held up the magic bow Failnaught and prepared to attack. A jet-black arrow appeared out of thin air between the bow and the arrow string, and the demon Oscar aimed it towards a corner of the audience stands — at the VIP gallery.

“S-STOP IT—!”

Silvia screamed out. Aside from the Chevron King, there were also various other nobles and royalty who were watching from there. Silvia’s father and sisters were also there.

“Haha!”

Oscar grinned as she let loose the jet-black arrow.

—Dooooooooooooooooooooooooooooon!

In an instant, an explosion sprouted from the VIP gallery. The audience members who were sitting near the VIP gallery were momentarily overwhelmed by shock, but they immediately began to flee like a flock of birds.

“Ah...! Father, my sisters...!”

Silvia's heart sank and she lowered her head in frustration.

“—It's all okay, Princess-sama!”

At that time, the voice of the boy that she trusted the most entered Silvia's ears. When she turned around to look, she saw Ash attempt to get up from the ground. Although he was no longer on Brigid's back, now was not the time to be worried about the rules of the tournament.

“Are you okay!?”

After realising that Ash had awoken from his unconscious state, Eco hurriedly caught up to him. Ash leaned on Eco's shoulders and stood up with all the energy that he could muster.

“Princess-sama, open your eyes wider and take a good look at the VIP gallery!”

The VIP gallery which was obscured by black smoke gradually began to clear.

“Glenn-dono!”

Silvia called out in relief. The seven Dragonars of Veronica's personal guard that Glenn McGuire led had all used layer upon layer of Hexagonal Shields to protect the lives of the distinguished guests. Glenn himself had equipped his Ark and he held the magic sword Caladbolg in his hand. As for Veronica, she personally stood right in front of Zacharias III. It seemed as though she had already been mentally prepared to sacrifice herself by acting as a human shield for the Chevron King in case of a crisis. Just at that time — the prided magic ship of the Chevron Kingdom, the *Claíomh Solais* appeared in the sky above the audience stands.



## Part 2

Pandemonium broke out as screams arose from all over the arena. The audience members who felt fear for their lives all rushed towards the exits. The members of the Student Council led by Rebecca were surrounded by waves of people on all sides as they tried to assist with evacuation guidance.

“There is no need to panic! Please act calmly!”

Rebecca was responsible for command while Jessica guided the flow of the crowd. Lucca’s role was to lead the people who were injured over to the infirmary. After Veronica confirmed the state of the audience, she murmured

“I originally planned to have Rebecca come over to assist us, but...”

“It is unfortunate Princess-sama. Rebecca Randall has just recovered from a serious injury, and her Pal Cú Chulainn is still recovering...the injury that Cú Chulainn sustained in the preliminary round seems to be worse than expected.”

The captain of her personal guard Glenn explained.

“I don’t need you to tell me that, of course I knew.”

*In terms of the outcome, it’s fine right now* — that was what Veronica thought as she coldly replied. Most of the common audience members who sat in the venue were citizens of the Knight Country that Veronica had to protect. The citizens were an indispensable foundation of a country. If it were possible, Veronica wanted to leave this group of weak and useless nobles to personally rush to the aid of the citizens. At that time, a slight buzzing sound was heard. It was a magic ship, the Claíomh Solais had thrown down a ladder into the VIP gallery. It seemed as though the Claíomh Solais would take the Chevron King as well as many of the other nobles away. The Chevron King took the lead, while the members of the Queen group followed behind him. The other nobles then followed. And then the Paladin of the Knight Country Oswald kept up with them as well, stepping onto the magic ship to escape the danger.

“Hmph. Originally, the nobility were the ones who were supposed to lead warriors into war, but now all they do is relax in the vast territories that they’re

given...truly, they've fallen so far."

While Veronica assisted Glenn to evacuate the nobles, she sighed with mixed feelings. Glenn quietly faced Veronica and whispered back

"Princess-sama. Her Highness Cassandra and Her Highness Mirabel...and the Third Prince Uriel are all missing. What should we do?"

"...There's nothing we can do. Protecting the Claíomh Solais is our top priority here."

Veronica wasn't particularly worried about her two younger sisters. It was because she understood more clearly than anyone else that those two were women who wouldn't die even if killed. On the other hand, the safety of the Third Prince Uriel was worrying, but there was currently insufficient manpower to go searching for the whereabouts of the prince.

"—Princess-sama! Oscar and Tristan are approaching us!"

Glenn suddenly shouted out, interrupting Veronica's stream of thought.

"Tsk, that bastard Oscar. Despite his loss of reason, he still seems to be capable of making tactical decisions."

Veronica bitterly muttered. After realising that long-distance attacks would be useless, Oscar immediately shifted into melee combat. The dark silhouette of a dragon continued to approach. Veronica strictly gave orders to her personal guard.

"Continue to use Hexagonal Shields to protect the Claíomh Solais! In the name of this group, the Claíomh Solais will remain unharmed!"

## Part 3

Having turned into a black dragon, Tristan continued to launch attacks at the magic ship Claíomh Solais.

“Foolish and ignorant old thieves, die!”

The demon Oscar issued death threats from atop Tristan’s head. Veronica’s personal guard had spread out in every direction to surround the Claíomh Solais, as if to disallow Oscar from winning. Led by their captain Glenn, the seven Dragonars were elites known to everyone in the Knight Country, but—

“How dare you shield those bastards, you should also share the same sins!”

One after the other, Oscar knocked down the members of the guard group. If this went on, even if the Claíomh Solais was able to get away, it would only be a matter of time before they were all taken out. Ash held onto Eco’s shoulders and was just barely able to stand himself up.

*“cough!”*

But immediately afterwards, he spat blood out from his mouth. His broken ribs had most likely caused some internal organ damage. His entire body was in pain. His situation of blood loss hadn’t improved either.

“No, you can’t fight in this state!”

Eco yelled with a pale expression. The trembling of Eco’s body radiated through to Ash through their touching skin, allowing Ash to deeply understand how worried Eco was for him. The biggest problem was the fact that Eco’s original Ark had ceased to exist, and he didn’t have the holy sword Excalibur either. To make matters worse, Brigid had returned to being an Asia. Looking closer, the <Seikoku> engraved on Eco’s hand had also completely disappeared. Considering this, it was likely that Brigid’s connection to her original master Raymond had already been restored. If it was truly as Mirabel said, Brigid’s transformation into a Maestro was only a temporary phenomenon.

“...That’s good, Brigid. You should go back to Raymond’s side.”

Ash patted Brigid's body. The reason why he was able to make it so far was all thanks to Brigid. Ash gently stroked Brigid's body with a sense of gratitude. Brigid reluctantly groaned, but it still dragged its injured body slowly to leave. The dragon was smart after all, and perhaps it understood that staying here would only make it a hindrance for Ash and the others.

"Ash, you should also hurry up and escape!"

Eco forcefully tried to persuade him.

"I can't do that. Celes once said to me 'No matter what happens, please don't give up on Oscar as a friend'."

"What!? Why did she make a request like that to you?"

Eco frowned as she looked at the side of Ash's face.

"And the fact that she said something like that...doesn't it mean that Celes knew from the beginning that something like this would happen?"

Ash nodded in agreement with Eco's deduction.

"I think so too. There is no doubt that Celes is somehow related to this situation. Or perhaps, Celes is the person who triggered this incident."

"If that's the case, you've got no reason to agree to Celes' request! You should be worrying about yourself right now!"

"...I'm sorry, Eco. I can't just sit and watch Oscar like that."

"What can you do!? What can you possibly do with your half-dead body?"

At that moment, Ash suddenly felt as though something was wrong.

"...It's strange."

"What's so strange?"

"I always thought that the mastermind behind Celes was Zacharias III, and that his aim was to take your blood, Eco. But why are Oscar and Tristan attacking the Claíomh Solais? Zacharias III is clearly one of the passengers aboard the ship..."

When he backtracked in his mind, Celes had used 'that person' to describe the mastermind, and she never once mentioned that it was the Chevron King.

“So you mean...!”

As if she had suddenly discovered an important truth, Eco lifted her face.

“That’s right. There is someone else who is controlling Celes from behind...as long as Zacharias III dies by Oscar’s hands, the throne will become empty and someone can then claim that Oscar was the King’s murderer. If the situation evolves into that, the greatest beneficiary is—”

After Ash reached that point, Eco’s eyes widened as if she had suddenly understood.

“Could it be the Third Prince Uriel...!?”

“It’s very likely. But there are many who have a claim to the throne, so I wouldn’t dare to be certain...but Prince Uriel has always been the opponent that Oscar is most wary of—”

“Aneue! Glenn-dono!”

Silvia’s sorrowful cry interrupted Ash’s words. Ash and Eco looked in the direction of Silvia and couldn’t help but feel speechless. The magic ship *Claíomh Solais* which had rescued all of the nobles and royalty was under threat from the demon Oscar and Tristan, and they appeared to be in danger. Veronica’s personal guard had yet to be defeated, but only the captain Glenn remained. He stood upon the head of the *Maestro Fergus* and fought against the demon Oscar in single combat. On the other hand, Veronica who was supposed to be protected by Glenn was standing courageously at the bow of the magic ship. She placed the scabbard of the enormous sword that she wielded down on the ground in front of her, and wrapped both hands around the hilt of the sword. It was as if she was determined to act as the last line of defence.

“Aneue! Just how determined are you...”

Silvia stared with dismay at Veronica’s heroic figure as she whispered that.

“Go to hell! Dog of Veronica!”

In the next instant, the demon Oscar unleashed a rain of arrows. Glenn and Fergus endured for a long time, but they eventually succumbed to the endless onslaught of arrows.

“They’re falling here!”

Ash couldn’t help but cry out. Fergus’ enormous body was falling before their eyes. The Dragonar Glenn had been thrown off his mount, and crashed hard onto the arena’s floor. The magic sword Caladbolg and his Ark disappeared at the same time.

“Glenn-dono!”

Silvia jumped off Lancelot and ran to Glenn’s side.

“I have to go save Veronica-sama—”

After Glenn muttered those words, he fainted.

“It’s your turn next, Veronica!”

The demon Oscar spoke in a voice that was clear and loud even to the people on the ground. When Ash looked up, Tristan’s body had become strange. Grotesque tentacles emerged from its abdomen one after the other. It looked as though a large group of earthworms were attacking the magic ship. There were so many tentacles that the magic ship was unable to ascend. Although the two magic engines roared loudly as they attempted to output their maximum power, the tentacles still remained and firmly held the magic ship down. The magic ship of the Chevron Royal Family that was supposed to be top-of-the-line was now just a bug which had been trapped in a spider’s web. As a result, they were unable to escape to safety, and they would soon be crushed by the tentacles that were binding it. At the same time, even more tentacles moved through the air as they headed straight towards Veronica who was standing at the bow of the ship.

“Aneeuuuueeeeeee——!”

Silvia’s scream reverberated throughout the arena for a long time.

## Part 4

Zah—!

The enormous sword slashed through the incoming tentacles. With all of her personal guard completely eliminated, Veronica could do nothing but fight against Tristan with just the weapon in her hands. The Chevron Kingdom's royal soldiers also appeared on deck to help in the resistance against the enemy, but in the face of the endless tentacles, they were no match for them and were forced to retreat. By reason, it was fair to say that they were also elites of the Kingdom, but...only Veronica bravely stood up to continue the fight. Every time she swung the enormous sword in her hands, five tentacles were cut and flew up into the air. A viscous liquid was ejected from the revolting cross sections that were cut. The tentacles which had lost their tips could do nothing but wriggle and twist.

"As expected of the <Iron Blood Valkyrie>. But how long do you think you can last?"

The demon Oscar seemed rather delighted as she admired the scene of Veronica and the tentacles.

"Hah!"

With a loud yell, Veronica cut off the tips of the tentacles once again.

"You're pretty good. It's quite amazing that you have such skill despite the fact that you're not a Dragonar. Aren't you even stronger than some of those useless Dragonars?"

"...Bastard. I dare you to say that again."

Veronica let out a deep voice that seemed to resemble the sound of a rumbling from the depths of hell. The demon Oscar was surprised.

"Oh, are you finally willing to talk to me?"

"Don't make fun of my cute subordinates. I won't forgive you!"

"Haha, I wonder what you can actually do to me?"



Just as the demon Oscar taunted her, Veronica felt something peculiar. It was as if the surrounding air changed, it was rather unbelievable. It was as if even the breeze had turned into a sharp blade. *It is impossible for any ordinary human being to give off such a dreadful aura* — the demon Oscar told herself. However, Veronica held her great sword and stared fiercely at the demon Oscar with a growing fighting spirit—.

## Part 5

“Princess Veronica...what is she planning to do? No matter how strong she is, it’s impossible for her to defeat Oscar and Tristan!”

“Instead of about worrying about others, why don’t you worry about yourself first!? Didn’t you break your ribs?”

Despite all his injuries, Ash still managed to answer Eco’s question

“My body doesn’t matter. After taking a short break, it’s already recovered quite a bit.”

“I don’t think so!”

“Ugh!”

After being poked at his side by Eco’s index finger, Ash felt so much pain that he could barely stand.

“Owww! Wait wait! I wasn’t serious!”

“If it hurts so much, then you should be hurrying over to the infirmary—”

“Try and receive this, my dragon-slaying sword technique—”

At that time, Veronica’s loud voice interrupted Eco’s words. A violent aura<sup>[6]</sup> that far surpassed humans was emanating from Veronica’s body. Even from some distance away, it was still possible to see that violent aura. It entirely fit the description of ‘spooky’. Even though that aura exerted a great pressure on Ash, it couldn’t erase the growing confusion in his mind.

“Hey, as a Princess of the Knight Country...is it alright to say something like ‘dragon-slaying’? Even if you’re trying to bluff, you can’t be that extreme...”

Ash endured the pain as his mind began to be filled with doubts. In the Lautreamont Knight Country, the act of killing a dragon was regarded as a serious crime.

“Seriously, she’s basically desecrating the dragon race!”

As a representative of the dragon race, Eco became enraged.

“—No, that was neither a bluff nor blasphemy. Veronica-sama has actually used her sword technique to kill a dragon in the past.”

All of a sudden, a female voice rang out from behind which surprised Ash so much that he almost jumped up. As he turned around, a familiar maid outfit — Cosette’s figure came into view. Ash didn’t realise when she had appeared behind him at all. In a flash, Veronica leapt and jumped onto Tristan’s head. Her golden silk-like hair fluttered and her cloak swayed in the wind. Veronica’s appearance as she soared through the air seemed so delicate that it was almost possible to forget about the heavy armour that she was wearing. That heroic figure was perfectly fitting of the image of the <Iron Blood Valkyrie>.

“Uooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhh!”

She unleashed a fierce flurry of strikes. It was almost as if Veronica herself had become a large sword—. Her fierce assault was like a flash of lightning. Ash couldn’t even tell how many times Veronica swung her sword in a single moment. As soon as Veronica landed back on the deck, an anomaly occurred. The tentacles that once bound the magic ship had all been torn asunder as if cut through by a scythe. All of the torn tentacles fell like heavy rain onto the magic ship, while their bodily fluids sprayed about everywhere. On top of that, a wound was left on one of Tristan’s forelimbs, and blood immediately dyed its black fur.

“Gooooooooohh...!”

After Tristan transformed into this jet-black appearance, this was the first time that it had let out a cry of pain. Since it could still hover in the air, it meant that the injury probably wasn’t serious, but that itself was already incredible.

“This can’t be! A mere human has actually injured Tristan...!?”

Taking advantage of the demon Oscar’s momentary surprise, the Cláíomh Solais continued to ascend into the air like a bird that had discovered a hole in its birdcage. Cosette looked on at the surreal scene and spoke while sighing at the same time

“...It is truly a pity. She was off by just a bit and now she’s missed her chance

to deal with Tristan.”

“Hey! Cosette! What kind of move was that!? You said that aneue used her sword to kill a dragon in the past!? I can’t pretend as though I didn’t hear that!”

Faced with Silvia’s aggressive questioning, Cosette solemnly replied

“Yes. There are only a handful of people even within the Knight Country’s Royal Family who know of this secret...but, the person who killed the Dark Dragon King Mordred, strictly speaking, it was Veronica-sama and not Julius-sama.”

“What...!?”

The unexpected response left Silvia with her mouth agape.

“But, the person who was cursed after killing the dragon was Prince Julius, right?”

After Ash asked that in a calm manner, Cosette began to explain

“At first, Julius-sama fought alone. But he shattered one of his arms in battle and was forced into a desperate situation. Veronica-sama was present at the time. Veronica-sama used the same technique that she just used to kill Mordred. By reason, Veronica-sama should have been the one to be cursed for killing the dragon...but Prince Julius voluntarily took it on her behalf. In fact, this secret is something that I’ve only heard about...”

“What you’re saying...is all of it true...?”

Silvia still seemed doubtful of it. Whilst Cosette explained all of that, the magic ship Claíomh Solais managed to escape from the grasp of Tristan’s reach and flew further and further away.

“Veronica—! How dare you hurt my Tristan, I swear that I will not forgive you!”

—Bshh! As if in response to Oscar’s fury, Tristan’s body gave birth to new tentacles. The tentacles moved at bullet-like speeds straight towards the deck of the Claíomh Solais which was unable to manoeuvre away.

“Aneue!”

Just as Silvia screamed out, the tentacles wrapped themselves around Veronica's right arm. Another tentacle then entangled her body. Veronica was unable to resist, and she was violently pulled away. Her heavy metal boots were lifted off them the deck. In the blink of an eye, Veronica had been pulled by the tentacles right in front of Tristan's nose. For the sake of being thorough, a third and a fourth tentacle attacked Veronica.

"Like this, even if you are the <Iron Blood Valkyrie>, there's no hope left!"

The demon Oscar arrogantly glared at Veronica while she was caught by the tentacles, and then smirked as she said

"After I've thoroughly abused you, I'll feed you to Tristan's stomach!"

## Part 6

“Tsk. What a pathetic blunder...”

Veronica murmured to herself in a self-deprecating manner. She currently felt as though she was being forced to float in the air. Perhaps the only fortunate thing amidst all of this was the fact that the demon Oscar had lost interest in the Claíomh Solais. The magic ship speedily flew away.

“This is the best live bait, Tristan! Make sure you savour her taste!”

Oscar stood on top of Tristan’s head as she shouted.

“Goooooooooooo...!”

Tristan seemed so excited that it couldn’t help but let out a roar.

“Hmph...this so-called life, is it truly nothing but an illusory journey? After all, perhaps from the very instant I used that technique to kill Mordred, it was destined that I would one day meet such an end...ugh!”

Veronica calmly accepted her own fate, but her expression suddenly distorted. A warm tentacle had made its way up to her neck. The intimidating feeling made even a woman as strong as Veronica feel dread.

“What is this slippery sensation...!?”

A sense of physical disgust spontaneously arose. All the great beasts, rare birds, animals and even unknown giant creatures had been the prey of Veronica, but it the first time that she had encountered an unknown tactile sensation like this.

“Kuku. I’m rather interested to see just how long that cold mask of yours will last!”

The demon Oscar showed a pleased expression.

—Crack!

Accompanied by the sound of metal being forcefully torn apart, tentacles invaded into the inner part of the solid armour that protected her virgin body

one after the other.

“S-Stop...!”

The feeling of the tentacles slithering all over her skin made Veronica feel an instinctive sense of danger. The sticky mucous gradually infiltrated every part of her skin.

—Gakiiin!

The metallic fasteners were finally destroyed, and the plate armour that covered her shoulders and her chest snapped open. Even her armour was unable to withstand the strength of the tentacles, so her underwear was instantly torn to shreds. Her ample bosom burst out from her shredded underwear. Every time the tentacles toyed with her, they shook about violently.

“Haa, haa...h-how repulsive...”

“What’s the matter with you, Veronica? You’re breathing so heavily. Looking at your miserable appearance, there’s no way I can say that you’re the <Iron Blood Valkyrie> now!”

Oscar didn’t forget to use words to add to the humiliation.

“S-Such disrespect...n-no more...ah!”

Veronica could no longer resist as she let out a moan.

“Hahaha! I never imagined that your voice would sound so cute when moaning!”

The demon Oscar revealed an extremely sinister side.



## Part 7

“Lancelot, we’re going to save aneue!”

Silvia clenched her fists so tightly that the reins she held could crumble. Although Lancelot was injured, it looked like it could still fly. This was something that could be credited to Ash who had stood up to protect them during the tournament battle.

“—You can’t act impulsively, Princess-sama.”

Cosette was originally helping to treat Glenn’s injuries, but she suddenly appeared in front of Silvia to block her path.

“Cosette, what is the meaning of this?”

“I will be a bit blunt. At present, Princess-sama is no match for Oscar-sama as an opponent.”

“I know that! But even if I have no chance of winning, I can’t just abandon aneue!”

“If you sacrifice your life for nothing Princess-sama, what would Veronica-sama say?”

“I-I...”

After Silvia went silent for a while, she opened her mouth again to say

“In other words, you’re telling me to sit here and watch aneue be tortured to death?”

Cosette didn’t say anything, and didn’t answer. In her anxious state, Silvia lost her patience.

“No matter how strong you are, your body is just made of human flesh, and it cannot stop a dragon! Fly, Lancelot!”

Silvia ignored Cosette’s blockade and attempted to whip down the reins in her hands, but—

“.....”

Lancelot didn't respond. Like a stone statue, it didn't budge.

"Is this for real? Lancelot actually ignored Princess-sama's orders..."

Ash muttered in amazement. Looking closely, Lancelot's eyes were fixated on Cosette.

"Kuu..."

After Lancelot made a puppy-like noise, it took a step back.

"Impossible! Lancelot is afraid of Cosette...?"

Ash looked back and forth between Cosette and Lancelot in disbelief. And then he realised — Cosette's body was surrounded by an extraordinarily immense violent aura—. In their current positions, Cosette was like a snake, and Lancelot was like a frog. Lancelot's movement were completely sealed off by Cosette's glare.

"Although there's a smile on her face, this is the first time that I've seen Cosette look this terrifying..."

Perhaps her animal instincts gave her a warning, as Eco's shoulders also stiffened.

"Kug! Are you serious, Cosette...?"

"I cannot allow Princess-sama and Lancelot to sacrifice their lives for no reason at all. Princess-sama, if you can't even take down a mere maid, then you have no chance of saving Veronica-sama."

After Cosette calmly replied—

"—Gooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhh!"

A powerful roar shook the air as it grew louder and louder. It was Tristan who unleashed that incredible roar whilst hovering above the arena. During the deadlock between Silvia and Cosette, another change had occurred with Tristan's body. The tentacles which had captured Veronica had retracted back into Tristan's chest. Veronica had been crucified like a saint with her left and right arms pinned up. Perhaps because she was already unconscious, Veronica didn't move at all. It looked as though Veronica's upper body was fixed to Tristan's chest in a rather uncanny way.

“Haha! I won’t kill a woman like you so easily! I’ll drain your essence bit by bit!”

The demon Oscar energetically declared in a loud voice. Based on what she had said, it was possible to see that Veronica was still breathing somewhat — but her life was like a candle just flickering in the wind.

## Part 8

In the clock tower, Celes clenched her fists as she shivered.

“That stupid thing! The target isn’t Veronica, it’s the Claíomh Solais carrying Zacharias III that got away, so hurry up and kill him!”

Celes screamed loudly towards the Pluto that was embedded in Tristan’s forehead. But Tristan didn’t care. Like this, the magic ship with Zacharias III had flown far away, and it was now just the size of a bean. At the beginning, Celes only planned to use the power of her magic eyes to control Tristan. Her original plan was to make Tristan, who had Pluto embedded on its forehead become a slave under her control, and then use its power to kill Zacharias III. She didn’t expect something like this to happen. The influence of Pluto spread to Oscar, turning her into a demon. As for what the demonic Oscar would do, even that was difficult for Celes to control.

“That thing! What is it thinking!?”

“—It looks like the situation is already out of control.”

Mirabel spoke from behind Celes. She sat comfortably on top of the folding chair that Eunice had prepared while gracefully sipping on black tea; it was almost as if she was enjoying the view. Although she didn’t interfere with Celes, her presence was undoubtedly annoying.

“Shut up!”

“Oh, I wasn’t speaking to you. I was talking to that gentleman.”

“What did you say!?”

Because she was too focused on using her magic eye, she didn’t pay any attention to the situation behind her, and Celes felt ashamed of her own mistake. She swiftly turned around to take a look.

“...What!”

As soon as she took a glance at the person who was standing behind her, Celes immediately knelt down on the spot.

“It looks like you’re struggling, Celestina.”

The person standing before her with a wry smile was her employer — the Third Prince Uriel.

“What an amusing spectacle.”

Standing beside Uriel was the bewitching presence of Princess Cassandra.

“Seriously, even a good cup of black tea has become difficult to drink...”

The moment she saw Cassandra, Mirabel furrowed her brow. The two sisters did not appear to get along with each other well.

“Y-Your Highness Uriel! What are you doing in a place like this...?”

Upon seeing Celes’ sincere expression, Uriel showed a bitter smile.

“I was originally planning to head straight over to the inn to rest, but Cassandra thought it was a rare opportunity, and she insisted on watching the special performance.”

Uriel politely said. A long time ago, Uriel had offered Celes to Zacharias III with an emotionless expression when she was just a little girl. On the surface, his offering of Celes was proof of his allegiance to his father, the King—. The Chevron King decided to safeguard her magic eye by sending her to the Lafon family for education. He also appointed Celes to oversee Oscar. However, even that idea of the Chevron King was within Uriel’s calculations. Indeed...the tragedy that had occurred in front of them was all based on the well-planned script that Uriel had devised years ago. Celes actually became Oscar’s maid and even told her about the secret of her magic eye. Just as Uriel predicted, Oscar enrolled into the Dragonar Academy and after a while, she made a request to Celes for Pluto to be embedded into Tristan’s body. Precisely because Oscar ranked last in the succession for the throne, she desired a great power more eagerly than anyone else. Celes responded to her request and embedded Pluto into Tristan. As a result, Tristan experienced an unusually rapid growth, and then soon became a Maestro. And then, this day finally arrived—.

## Part 9

“No, I can’t stand this anymore!”

Silvia jumped down from Lancelot’s back. Since Lancelot was intimidated by Cosette’s aura and didn’t dare to act rashly, the only thing that Silvia could do was to deal with Cosette personally and force her to concede. However, as soon as Silvia stepped onto the ground, a cold chill ran down her spine.

—Gogogogogo...!

With Cosette at the centre, there was an unusual kind of force field around her that seemed to give off the impression that a single step inside would cause injury.

“Ugh! I thought that aneue was scary when she got angry, but I never imagined that...”

With just this, Silvia felt as though she would soon faint. She even began to doubt if Cosette was human, fearing that she might even be as ruthless as the demon Oscar.... As if to add to Silvia’s fear, Cosette gave a warning

“Don’t waste your energy, Princess-sama. If you get any closer, you might even be knocked over and lose consciousness from my aura.”

It obviously wasn’t just a threat. There was a thick and solid wall that stood in between Silvia and Cosette. It was a barrier that had been constructed with her violent aura that was invisible to the naked eye.

“Please calm down, Princess-sama. The city of Fontaine has likely already received news of this incident. I think waiting for the Lautreamont Royal Dragonar Squad is the most appropriate course of action.”

“Don’t kid me! Aneue will lose her life before they arrive! Moreover, has the Royal Dragonar Squad ever saved Ansarivan from any of its crises? Haven’t Ash and Eco dealt with the situation every single time!?”

Silvia advanced with this awareness.

“...!”

In an instant, her entire body suffered a shock as if she had been struck by lightning. Silvia almost fainted, but she clenched her teeth and managed to stay standing. She continued to step forward.

*“cough!”*

At that time, Silvia coughed up a mouthful of blood. Her legs wobbled and she could barely even stand properly. *I can't do this anymore* — just when Silvia gave up, someone supported her body from behind.

“You can do this, Princess-sama!”

“Ash...?”

Silvia held onto her consciousness by a single thread. She didn't dare to look at Ash's face. Ash had injuries all over his body.





Blood still continued to stream down his forehead, and simply standing should have been a great burden for him. On top of that, he had stepped into this area that was filled with Cosette's violent aura.

"Y-You idiot! You should think about your body a bit! You can't stand the torment of Cosette's aura right now...!"

"I can't sit back and watch Princess-sama just because of something like this either! Moreover, I don't want to see Princess Veronica die like this either!"

Ash looked at Silvia with a serious expression.

"Ash...!"

Silvia's heartbeat rapidly accelerated. A constant stream of strength seemed to circulate within her body, and even she was in disbelief.

*—So having someone precious to rely on can be such a heart-warming thing...!*

"Thank you, Ash. Will you...continue to walk with me?"

"Yeah, of course."

And then, they felt an unquenchable sense of anger 'gogogogogo...' from behind them. Needless to say, the source of that anger was Eco.

*—I'm sorry, Eco. I'm just borrowing him for this time, so please let me walk side by side with Ash.*

After Silvia apologised to Eco in her mind, she moved forward whilst being supported by Ash.

"Ash-sama, by my judgement, your body is seriously injured and you will need to rest for three month if you wish to fully recover. If you continue to come closer...I may not be able to guarantee your life."

Cosette's tone became so cold that it almost felt as though she was an entirely different person. It felt as though Cosette was more a demon than even Oscar right now. Even so, Ash didn't flinch and instead replied

"I would rather be buried here than to distort my beliefs and flee."

"Ash...!"

Silvia resisted the tears which were almost about to burst out from her eyes.

She committed Ash's words to her mind and continued to move forward—. As they continued to shrink the distance between them and Cosette, the aura also became denser.

“Ugh! What kind of feeling is this...!”

What hit them now was a feeling that seemed to resemble being crushed by gravity. It was almost as if their weight had increased by several times in just an instant.

*“cough!”*

Ash couldn't help but cough up more blood. Having suffered serious injuries, it was indeed difficult for him to endure this kind of aura. Ash then slumped over and fell onto Silvia's body. This time, Silvia came to Ash's rescue.

“Are you okay, Ash!? Ash!”

The colour of Silvia's face gradually turned pale. Cosette's warning was correct, and it was possible that he would lose his life if he went on like this...!

“...Ash!”

And then Ash's body suddenly felt lighter.

“Geez, I can't keep watching this!”

Unexpectedly, Eco rushed in. She helped to support Ash who was growing unstable as his legs became limp.

“Eco, you...!”

Silvia looked at Eco with a tearful gaze. Although her body was outwardly thin and small, she was just barely able to withstand Cosette's aura as a dragon.

“Haa...I must have been infected by Ash's idiotic disease!”

Eco coldly averted her face. But Silvia still felt that it was very sweet of her. And then, Ash murmured as if he were in a trance

“Thank you, Eco...”

“Hmph. When you recover, I'll crush you three times over!”

“Haha, I'll be hospitalised again immediately after I recover...”

Ash smiled bitterly as he turned to look at Silvia.

“Let’s go, Princess-sama.”

“Yes, of course!”

Silvia nodded energetically. There was no longer any reason for her to hesitate. Ash supported the determined Silvia. And Eco also supported the exhausted Ash. They challenged Cosette while supporting each other. Even if they were exhausted, from this moment forward, they would be able to make it across because of their concerted efforts.

“We’re coming, Cosette!”

After Silvia courageously declared that—

“—You passed, Princess-sama.”

After Cosette exposed a cheeky smile, she released the force field that she had constructed with her aura. At the same time, their originally breathless and overwhelmed bodies were liberated. Ash and Eco couldn’t help but collapse backwards onto the ground.

“Cosette, what are you doing...?”

Silvia also wanted to sit on the ground to catch her breath, but she held back. The most important thing for her right now was to ask about what Cosette was thinking. Cosette didn’t answer Silvia’s question, but turned to look at Lancelot instead.

“—It’s time. Princess-sama has successfully overcome my trial and has demonstrated strength befitting of a princess of the Knight Country. She has also gained reliable comrades.”

Cosette’s expression was peaceful and calm, and she continued in a solemn tone

“Come, Lancelot. Present the thing that you prepared to Princess-sama.”

“Uooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhh!”

Lancelot suddenly let out a deafening roar. Just as Silvia confusedly turned around to look at Lancelot—

“W-What’s happening...!?”

Silvia’s vision was suddenly dyed white. Unable to understand what had happened to her body, Silvia was filled with unease. After a while, Lancelot appeared in front of her and they stood face-to-face. In the mysterious space that was illuminated by white light, all that existed was Silvia and Lancelot. Lancelot’s mighty face looked gentler than usual at this time, or perhaps that was just an illusion...? After Lancelot respectfully put its forearms on the ground, it let out a proud roar into the sky. Instantly, a warm glow enveloped Silvia’s entire body.

“This is...!”

The Dragsuit that Silvia was wearing vanished like smoke. And then—.

Breastplate, backplate, faulds, culet, tassets, crown, pauldrons, rerebraces, couters, vambraces, gauntlets, cuisses, poleyns, greaves, sabatons, spurs...a sleek armour was formed in sequence and then equipped onto Silvia’s body. Then, a cape emerged from her left and right shoulders and fluttered with the wind. And the final part to manifest was a crown that was adorned with Bright Dragon Crystals. The outfit was practically made for Princess Silvia. From this point forward, Silvia had also become a Dragonar that exceeded other Dragonars — an Ark Dragonar.

“Princess-sama! Your new appearance is so pretty ...!”

Ash was so stunned by the heroic and awe-inspiring appearance of the Princess Dragonar that even the pain in his body was pushed into a far corner of his mind. Its appearance was a perfect match for the name of <Ice Blue Princess>.

“...The quality of that Ark is good, that’s for sure.”

Although Eco was reluctant, she also seemed as fascinated as Ash when she looked at it. It was probably stimulating for her to be able to see the work of another dragon.

“Y-You don’t have to keep staring at me...it’s very embarrassing.”

As soon as she noticed Ash’s gaze, Silvia began to blush. Although her appearance had completely changed, she still seemed to be the same person in

terms of personality. Somehow, that was a relief to Ash. After Silvia reinvigorated herself, her expression sharpened.

“Hey, Cosette! Although I have a mountain of questions for you, I’ve decided to defeat Oscar and rescue aneue first! Let’s go, Lancelot! I have faith that I won’t lose to anyone right now!”

After Lancelot let out a mighty roar, it let Silvia climb up onto the saddle. Silvia grabbed onto the reins and flew up together with Lancelot.

“Speaking of which, Cosette...did you already know that Lancelot had completed its Ark?”

Ash asked and looked at Cosette with curiosity. Cosette touched her chin and giggled ‘ufufu’ as she said

“It’s because Lancelot is my drinking partner.”

“What did you say?”

Hearing that, Ash almost fell over. He endured the pain at his ribs.

“Please don’t joke, how is that possible? Anyway, what does Lancelot even drink?”

“Obviously, it’s Ansal.”

“T-That’s called bribery, right...?”

Ash was reminded of the recent incident at the Academy where Oscar tempted Eco with Ansal tea.

“Grrrrrrr...”

At that time, Glenn’s Pal, Fergus stood back up whilst the muscles in all four of its legs trembled. Seeing its master unconscious, Fergus sent a sharp gaze towards Ash.

“No way, does that mean I’m supposed to ride you!?”

Fergus slowly nodded. It was an unwritten rule that dragons prohibited riders other than their master to ride on their backs. Despite this, Fergus simply gave Ash a glance and then acquiesced to have him to ride on its back. Even though Ash was the ‘boy who can ride any dragon’, something like this was still

abnormal. Eco then became irritated.

“What is this dragon thinking!? Ash’s body is heavily injured! How can he possibly continue to fight!?”

Disregarding Eco’s emotional outburst, Cosette smiled as she said to Ash

“Ash-sama. I’ve already helped you with some general first aid.”

Only when this was said did Ash notice that the wounds on his arms, legs and abdomen had all been tightly wrapped up. The speed and precision of the treatment left Ash at a loss for words. Although there was a bit of dull pain, at least the bleeding had stopped.

“Fergus is probably worried for Veronica-sama’s safety. After all, in Fergus’ eyes, Glenn-sama has sworn allegiance to Veronica-sama, so she’s almost like another master. Leave Oscar-sama to Princess-sama while I treat Glenn-sama; you should focus on saving Veronica-sama, Ash-sama.”

Ash enthusiastically nodded in reply to Cosette.

“Alright, let’s go! Fergus!”

Ash skilfully jumped up onto Fergus’ head — but frustratingly, due to his current lack of strength, he was only able to climb onto its neck before struggling a bit to climb onto its head. A simple and easy action like this made his wounds ache so bad that he felt close to death. If Cosette hadn’t performed emergency treatment on him, it was likely that his blood would have sprayed out by now.

“Geez! You’re so hopeless!”

Eco also climbed up onto Fergus reluctantly, and then lent her shoulders to Ash for support as they rode together. Ash gratefully placed his hands on Eco’s shoulders. Fergus spread its wings with a roar.

“Princess-sama, please don’t be reckless...!”

Ash murmured while following the silvery-white trail that was painted by Lancelot.

“You’re the reckless one!”

Eco gave a quick lecture to Ash, but she still supported Ash's body closely.

"Speaking of which...what is the crystal that's embedded on Tristan's forehead? It feels as though it should be the culprit behind this whole incident, but..."

[—Allow me to tell you the answer to that question.]

And then, Navi's voice resounded within Ash's mind.

"The Ark for Silvia *A.S.B.1365.10*" is closed.

# Chapter 7 - Uranus and Pluto

## Part 1

“This is a destructive weapon that can turn the entire continent into ashes. And so I vow to that I will only wield this extraordinary power to protect the people that I love. I swear this as the Fourth Princess of the Knight Country, Silvia Lautreamont! Appear, the power to destroy evil! The Dragonar Gun bestowed to me by the great Maestro Lancelot — its name is Arondight!”

Silvia recited the chant and summoned her Ark Weapon. Its appearance was like a fusion between a lance used by cavalry and a gun. Similar to the blue and silver Ark that Lancelot had created, it was a beautiful long-barrelled gun. Silvia analysed the design of the Ark Weapon in her mind. According to the blueprint made by Lancelot, an ordinary bullet was not suitable for use in this Dragonar Gun. Based on the design, the weapon seemed to use Bright Dragon Crystals as ammunition. So long as a crystal was mounted in, the Dragonar Gun would internally convert and use it as energy that could be fired. In addition, as long as Bright Dragon Crystals with different attributes were used, it was possible to launch various different elemental attacks such as with fire or water. In the part that was equivalent to a magazine, the Bright Dragon Crystals that Lancelot secreted had already been installed.

“Hmph. So what if you’ve become an Ark Dragonar, I’ll advise you not to be careless just because of that!”

The demon Oscar yelled loudly. Although there was still a fair distance between both sides, that voice was still loud and clear. Silvia didn’t listen to those word of spite, and she held the Dragonar Gun up with both hands.

“Let’s go, Lancelot!”

When the distance between her and Oscar was narrowed to only a hundred metres, Silvia pulled the trigger. Only a gunshot was heard — no, it could be described as a boom akin to that of a cannon which resounded in the sky.



“W-What is this!?”

Silvia was hit with an unexpectedly powerful recoil, and she staggered back as far as she could. Her entire body had almost been pushed off from the dragon that she rode, and it was fortunate that she was just barely able to stand. The Bright Dragon Crystal had turned into a magic bullet, and it pierced through the space several metres away from Tristan’s rear side. Just that was enough to cause Tristan’s enormous body to lose its balance. Because of the immense pressure generated by the trajectory of the magic bullet, even its body was pulled in. The one that Silvia initially used was a Bright Dragon Crystal of the wind element. She had only intended to warn Oscar with that shot. It simply wasn’t possible for her to open fire directly at Tristan with the intention to harm. After all, Veronica’s naked body was still buried in Tristan’s chest.

“This can’t be possible! Dragons should all have inherent limits set on the power of their Ark Weapons! Is Lancelot allowing its master’s possession of such a destructive weapon...?”

The smile suddenly disappeared from the demon Oscar’s face.

“Don’t be mistaken, Oscar. The Dragonar Gun Arondight is not a weapon of destruction!”

“Then what do you call it!?”

“This is — the power to protect!”

Silvia majestically declared. A fierce aerial battle thus began.

## Part 2

While riding atop the Maestro Fergus, Ash continued to watch the aerial battle between Silvia and the demon Oscar. The demon Oscar locked on to Lancelot and fired off an endless rain of arrows. Silvia accurately shot down every single one of the demon's attacks without fail. The Dragonar Gun was just like the holy sword Excalibur, it possessed the ability to nullify the power of fate that was imbued by the magic bow Failnaught. On the other hand, because Fergus was injured, just flying in the air was difficult. As it was now, it was impossible to actively assist Silvia, but Silvia probably wouldn't want him to jump in and interfere anyway. Ash's responsibility was to protect Veronica in an emergency and to take her away from the battlefield. While keeping an eye on the battle, Ash and Eco listened to Navi's explanation at the same time.

[The black crystal on Tristan's forehead is actually a legacy of Nehalennia's Underworld Dragon Family — Pluto.]

Navi used telepathy to speak to those two in their minds.

"Nehalennia!? Could it be something that Mordred did — kuh!"

Ash's momentary astonishment caused his ribs to ache and he began to feel a dull pain there.

[No. It should be someone from the present era who used Pluto through genetic inheritance to cause this incident.]

"Genetic inheritance? Isn't Pluto a stone? How can it be like a living organism..."

[Pluto is a magical stone of darkness, and it specifically parasitises on people who are known as <Pluto's Children>. In terms of this kind of behaviour alone, it does seem like a living organism though.]

"Really..."

[The culprit who has caused this with the stone on Tristan's forehead is a descendant of <Pluto's Children> — the maid called Celes. Mordred has nothing

to do with this.]

“I see...”

In any case, Ash couldn't help but feel relieved upon learning that Mordred didn't play a part in this incident. Eco also sighed. On the contrary, after learning that Celes was a descendant of <Pluto's Children>, they were finally able to gain a clear outline of the entire incident.

“To sum up, the cause behind all of this is the thing called Pluto, right? So if we can just destroy that thing, then—”

[That won't work. The Pluto that Celes has given to Tristan is attached directly to the brain. If you recklessly destroy it...then Tristan will die.]

“Kuh! Then what exactly can we do to save Tristan's life?”

After going silent for a while, Navi used telepathy to convey her words again.

[The only way is to wait for Oscar and Tristan to break the curse of Pluto, and bring Pluto under their control. It's just that Oscar's consciousness has been imprisoned by Pluto, and it probably won't be easy to break free...]

“What do you mean by imprisoned?”

[The demon Oscar is actually another personality that has temporarily been given form by Oscar's negative emotions. The true Oscar is currently hiding in the abyss of darkness, sealing off all vision and hearing...]

“Then, so long as we can reach Oscar's consciousness and try to convince her...then it should work? Then problem is just how to reach her consciousness...?”

[I can send your spiritual body to get in touch with Oscar. By going through the Dragon Workshop, I can send you to the place where Oscar is imprisoned. The key then lies in your performance afterwards.]

Ash was resolute in his determination and didn't feel any sense of confusion. To Ash, it was sufficient so long as there was a way for him to reach Oscar.

“Alright, then please start.”

[That's a rather quick decision. Obviously, I still don't know if you'll be able to

come back alive—]

“Hey! If it’s such a dangerous thing, then you shouldn’t make a decision so hastily!”

Eco angrily yelled to interrupt Navi, who seemed slightly surprised.

“You don’t have to worry about me. And with the state that my body is currently in, it’s probably easier to be in my spiritual body.”

Ash’s entire body was still crying out in pain. Even when he was just talking like this, he would occasionally feel pain in his body.

“Haa...okay. But you have to promise to me that you’ll definitely come back alive.”

“Yeah, I promise.”

Ash clenched his teeth to endure the pain as he raised his hand to pat Eco’s head. He then shouted to Navi

“Please send me in!”

## Part 3

“...So Oscar is in this space?”

Having moved into his spiritual body, Ash examined his surroundings with wide eyes. It was a mysterious space. The deep darkness extended like a straight road indefinitely. Although the atmosphere was somewhat similar to the Dragon Workshop, it gave off a narrow and more enclosed feeling. Various kinds of scenes floated around and past Ash, and then quickly disappeared. It was like a slideshow consisting of numerous landscapes and portraits. After a while, Ash realised that they were all fragments of Oscar’s memory. It was because there were many scenes in which Celes’ figure was visible. The only person that Celes was close to that Ash could think of at this point was Oscar.

“I see. This place...must be Oscar’s heart.”

As Ash moved deeper into the interior of the space, the stream of memories began to grow older. Occasionally when glimpsing into these memory fragments, he could see Celes who appeared to be around ten years old. Memories involving Dragonar Academy were completely absent here, and instead, most of the scenery involved agricultural landscapes that Ash was unfamiliar with. The location in those memories were most likely the territory of the Brailsford family that Oscar was adopted into. After a while — Ash finally arrived at the end. A completely naked girl was curled up in the depths of the abyss. In terms of age, she appeared to be around twelve years old. Her long shoulder-length hair was tied into a ponytail behind her head, and she buried her face in between her folded knees. Although he couldn’t see the girl’s face, Ash believed that she was Oscar.

“Oscar! Answer me! You’re Oscar, right?”

No matter how loud Ash yelled, Oscar refused to lift her head.

[—Don’t get in the way.]

The sound of Celes’ voice was suddenly heard, and Ash was taken aback. All he could hear was her voice, he couldn’t see her figure anywhere. When he

thought calmly about it, he recalled that Celes was currently manipulating Pluto. She must have used the black magical stone to transmit her thoughts.

[Get out, Ash Blake. Uriel-sama ordered me to use Tristan to assassinate Zacharias III, and to cause the downfall of Oscar. I don't intend to take Oscar's life away as well...]

"Are you serious!? Isn't Oscar your precious master!?"

[...She is certainly my most important master! But I cannot go against Uriel-sama. That person brought me light. Because of my relationship with Pluto, everyone except for my mother alienated and rejected me, but Uriel-sama was willing to accept a person like me...and thanks to Uriel-sama's assistance, my mother was able to have a normal person's life. When I consider my mother's future, the only person that I can obey is Uriel-sama...]

"Stop this nonsense! Uriel is obviously just using your mother as a hostage, and forcing you to obey him, right!? What kind of justice is that!?"

[I've long been aware of what you're saying. But...I have no other way...]

After saying that, Celes' voice disappeared. It was probably because she concentrated her mind on Pluto.

"...So noisy."

Oscar finally looked up and murmured with a sullen look.

"I...really want to sleep right now. It'd be best if I just sleep like this and don't wake up..."

Ash was incredibly shocked. That melancholic attitude didn't suit Oscar at all. Perhaps the positive aspects had all been taken away by the demon Oscar.

"You idiot...!"

Ash couldn't help but unleash his anger. In the real world, Silvia and the demon Oscar had begun a fierce battle. Although Silvia had become an Ark Dragonar, Lancelot had been injured, and it also should have consumed a vast amount of magic during the decisive battle. In terms of skill as a Dragonar, the demon Oscar probably had the upper hand. Calmly analysing the situation, Silvia understood that it was disadvantageous for her to draw out the battle. In

order to win this battle, it was absolutely necessary to persuade Oscar and bring her back to the real world.

“Stop this! Your attitude has always been defiant and arrogant, you go around seducing girls everywhere, and you’re also a top-notch Dragonar — where has that Oscar Brailsford gone? What use is there for you to hide here when you have strength comparable to Rebecca-san!?”

Ash was swayed by his emotions and let out a stream of words. But Oscar was still unmoved.

“Hey! Didn’t you say that you were going to become the future King of Chevron!?”

“...!”

Oscar’s fingers suddenly twitched.

“Stand up, future King of Chevron! Take Celes back from Uriel’s hands! Use your strength to subdue the curse of Pluto! Show your greedy side and devour the demon Oscar!”

Before he noticed, Oscar was staring at Ash’s face.

“But...”

Oscar was still hesitant. Ash walked over to Oscar’s side and then pulled her into his arms without saying a word.

“...!”

Oscar was so surprised that she couldn’t speak.

“I’ll be your friend! I’ll lend you my strength, and help you become king!”

Ash embraced Oscar even more tightly. Although both Ash and Oscar had left their true bodies in the real world, they could still feel the warmth of each other.

“Thank you, Ash.”

Oscar’s pupils suddenly reignited, and light returned to them. At the same time, her young appearance gradually began to grow. Her deep black hair grew to cover her back, and her limbs also stretched. The twin peaks upon her chest

also bulged up plentifully. Oscar had finally returned to her original self.

“I’m going to step forward first, Ash.”

After Oscar smiled, she turned into particles of light that disappeared. She had probably set off to fight against the demon Oscar.

[—Ash, you succeeded.]

And then, Navi’s voice floated down from overhead.

“Thank you, Navi. But the next thing is key. Although I’ve managed to convince Oscar, I don’t think the demon Oscar will be defeated that easily. What should I do now?”

[Don’t worry. That thing can come in handy.]



## Part 4

The large arena of Dragonar Academy had almost been completely destroyed now. The task of evacuating the crowd had not made any progress. Although Rebecca and the others had done their best to provide instructions and direction, the crowd was simply overwhelming. Even now, there were still hundreds of people remaining in the audience area, and they ran around in panic. The number of wounded and injured was constantly on the rise, and this would only further drag down the speed of evacuation. It was a vicious cycle.

“Kuh...as long as aneue remains a hostage to the opponent, I cannot attack Tristan directly.”

Silvia muttered desperately as she was unable to think of a countermeasure. Silvia and the demon Oscar were fighting against each other at a height of one hundred metres above the ground. Meanwhile, the Maestro Fergus was hiding in a corner of the destroyed arena. Ash and Eco were both riding atop its head. Their original plan was to rescue Veronica when Oscar showed an opening. As a result, Silvia would be able to fight without having any worries. However, what worried Silvia right now was the fact that Ash appeared to be in an unconscious state. But, Eco seemed rather calm next to him.

“—It’s time to finish this battle.”

Silvia’s mind was were drawn back to reality by the demon Oscar’s voice.

“From what I can see, Lancelot is already at its limits. It looks like it could run out of magical energy and fall at any time.”

*His observation is really sharp...*Silvia irritably thought to herself.

“Also, I’ve thought about something rather important. I’ll go and destroy the Claíomh Solais in just a minute.”

Oscar’s tone was so causal and natural that it was as if she was just going to meet a friend for lunch.

“Are you serious!?”

The guests of the magic ship Claíomh Solais included the Chevron King and a large number of other royals and nobles. If that magic ship was destroyed, it would inevitably cause a lot of turmoil across the world. What angered Silvia even more was Oscar's disregard for human life.

"Speaking of which, that guy has been hiding in the audience stands for quite a while now. Does he think that he's been hiding so well that I wouldn't have noticed? Although I don't know what you're all up to, I think it's about time for him to disappear."

After the demon Oscar mumbled that to herself, she drew back the bowstring of the magic bow Failnaught. The target of the drawn arrow was in a corner of the rubble — the Maestro Fergus.

"No!"

Silvia rapidly descended towards that corner of the audience gallery. At the same time, the demon Oscar released the arrow.

"Please make it there in time!"

Silvia made an emergency stop right in front of the rubble with Lancelot and immediately raised her Dragonar Gun to fire back. The magic bullet swallowed the arrow, causing the fate of 'shooting through Fergus' to disappear as well.

"Kuku...I wonder how long you can hold out for."

The demon Oscar began to fire a wild onslaught of arrows. Although Oscar's attention was diverted away from the magic ship Claíomh Solais, the problem was that Silvia's ammunition would soon run out. Lancelot's magic was nearly depleted, and it was now impossible to ask it to produce more Bright Dragon Crystals that could be used as ammunition.

"Hey, Eco! Ash looks like he's unconscious, what's going on?"

Silvia deflected the oncoming arrows while she asked Eco who was behind her.

"Ash is persuading Oscar right now..."

Eco quietly replied so as to prevent the demon Oscar from overhearing.

"...Can you give me a few more details?"

Silvia also lowered her voice a bit.

“I-I don’t really understand it myself. Anyway, just protect Ash please!”

“I’d do that without you having to tell me!”

After Silvia boosted her own morale, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to defence.

“—Guuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahh!”

At that time, the demon Oscar suddenly held her head in pain and let out an intense cry.

## Part 5

Just when Oscar let out a pained wail—

“—\*gasp\*!”

Like a diver who had just emerged at the surface of water, Ash gasped heavily as he awoke.

“Geez! I was so worried about you!”

Eco couldn't hold back her tears as she clung onto Ash's body.

“Owww!”

The sudden pain across his body caused Ash's face to distort.

“I-I'm...sorry.”

Eco remembered that Ash was injured, so she quickly lightened the strength of her embrace.

“You're awake, Ash! Quickly tell me what's happening to Oscar!”

Silvia shouted out to ask from the other side of the rubble.

“Oscar is currently trying to resist the curse of Pluto — *cough!*”

Ash tried to get back up, but he couldn't stop himself from coughing up blood again.

“Hey! Are you okay!?”

Eco's expression showed worry as she looked at the paling colour of Ash's face. She took out her handkerchief to help Ash wipe his lips and chin. The white handkerchief was instantly dyed red.

“Eco, please. Give this thing...to Princess-sama.”

Ash gave up on the idea of getting up, and instead took something out from his pocket. His bloodied hands held a single pink Bright Dragon Crystal.

“T-That's my...!”

Eco felt incredibly embarrassed.

“Yeah, this is the first Bright Dragon Crystal that Eco produced for me. Although I used it to summon you once, there should still be enough magical energy in it.”

“Why are you giving it to Silvia?”

“I heard from Navi. The Bright Dragon Crystals produced by *Avalon’s* Holy Dragons’ *Emperor* Family are very different and special, they’re called <sup>Uranus</sup> Holy Star Stone. It’s exactly the opposite of Pluto...Uranus has a holy attribute. And I want Princess-sama to help me with something...”

“How do you want me to help you?”

Silvia allowed Lancelot to move closer to Fergus while she kept an eye on Oscar who was in the air above them. Oscar was currently still in the midst of a painful struggle, and she constantly let out bone-chilling wails.

“That Dragonar Gun uses Bright Dragon Crystals as ammunition, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Then...I hope that you can use your gun to fire this Uranus.”

“What are you planning?”

“Lock on to the Pluto embedded on Tristan’s forehead...but don’t destroy it. If you break the stone, then Tristan will die with it. All it has to do is touch — *cough!*”

Seeing Ash’s condition worsen, Eco’s heart felt like it was tightening.

“...As long as I do that, can we save Oscar and Tristan?”

Although Silvia was probably quite worried about Ash’s body as well, she didn’t particularly express concern.

“That’s what Navi told me, and I believe in her words.”

“Alright.”

After Silvia received the Bright Dragon Crystal, she loaded it into the Dragonar Gun. She sat on Lancelot’s saddle and pointed the muzzle directly at the sky. *Will it really be okay...*unease began to mount in Eco’s mind. Sure enough,

Silvia's arms trembled. After all, everything was riding on this shot, so it was no surprise that she felt nervous.

"Stop! STOOOP IT! Oscar! Don't confuse me—...!"

But the demon Oscar's shrill screams never stopped, and Silvia found it difficult to concentrate.

"...Can you...hold my body? No, even if you're just touching me..."

Even Silvia's voice began to tremble. Despite her usual imposing manner that displayed the elegance of a princess all the time, her timid nature hadn't changed.

"Haa...okay."

Eco sighed and then moved from Fergus to Lancelot so that she could hug Silvia from behind. Although Silvia was wearing her Ark, Eco could still feel the warmth of her body. Eco silently swore to herself *'Someday, I'll also build something like this...no, I'll make the world's best Ark for Ash to wear.'*

"Like this?"

"Umm...I'm not that happy about it, but I can accept it."

Eco became enraged by those words.

"What did you say!? You wouldn't have...originally wanted Ash to hug you, right!?"

"U-Umm, I...!"

At such a critical moment, Silvia panicked because of such a problem.

"—How about like this?"

And then, two arms stretched out from behind Eco. Those arms were much stronger than they had been when Eco was born, and they held onto Silvia's shoulders.

"...Ash! You can already move!?"

Eco turned her head over her shoulders and widened her eyes. As he was now, Ash looked incredibly haggard, almost as if he was about to burn out.

“Haha, actually...my body won’t stay up for much longer, but the only way that I can help right now...is just like this...”

“Thank you, Ash.”

Silvia felt deeply moved by the action as she thanked him. For some reason, Eco suddenly felt rather disappointed.

“Hey, Silvia! You have to make sure it hits!”

“I know!”

Silvia calmly locked onto the target this time. Her hands were no longer trembling. To be honest, the way they looked right now was not cool at all. From the eyes on an unsuspecting third party — one would probably think that Ash and Eco were simply stuck behind Silvia who was responsible for the gun. Although it was rather awkward, it was warm. Sandwiched in between Silvia’s back and Ash’s chest, a warm feeling arose in Eco’s heart. And then, all that was heard was a single gunshot that reverberated through the sky—.





“The Two Stones *A.S.B.1365.10*” is closed.

# Epilogue

## Part 1

—The curtain was closed on the [Ansarivan Five Hundred Years Festival] due to a major unprecedented incident. In the top floor of the hotel for royalty in Ansarivan's city—

“Fufu. So it failed in the end.”

The Knight Country's Second Princess Cassandra Lautreamont leisurely admired the night view of Ansarivan's city. Sitting on a sofa, Uriel revealed a bitter smile while holding up a wine glass. The bullet that Silvia fired at the Pluto embedded in Tristan's forehead had caused some kind of effect. But it clearly wasn't destruction. If the Pluto was destroyed, then Tristan would have died. The only thing that could be determined was that Oscar and Tristan had overcome the control of Pluto, and Celestina was arrested by the authorities — just these two facts. In the end, after seeing Oscar and Tristan emerge from the control of Pluto, Uriel and Cassandra returned to their hotel. As for what kind of punishment would be given to Celestina, Uriel didn't know and he didn't have any interest in knowing either. Needless to say, he wasn't worried about her in the slightest. Even if Celestina revealed Uriel to be the mastermind, it wasn't a big deal to him. As long as he argued that the opposition had no evidence to serve as proof, he could quickly return to his country to avoid further commotion.

“...Indeed. The original plan was to make Tristan go berserk, and if that was successful, use it to assassinate Zacharias III and in turn kick Oscar out of the succession to the throne — both goals were defeated. But, the whole process was quite interesting. Despite being last in the succession to the throne, I've once again recognised that that child...no, that girl truly cannot be underestimated.”

“You're such a strange person. All you have to do is reveal the secret that

Oscar is a woman, and once that is done, she'll lose her right to the throne."

Cassandra's tone was filled with sarcasm.

"Haha. Even if I win the throne in that way, it wouldn't really make one feel happy, right? Moreover, to abandon her identity as a woman for the sake of the throne...that's not something that can be done so easily. As her adversary, I can't help but admire her determination."

"You have a lot of room for leisure, but in the off-chance that Ash Blake and Oscar join forces, won't that pose a threat to you?"

"No, I actually expect that the situation will develop in that direction, and then we'll be able to have a fair contest. Because I still have you as my trump card. As things are right now, it's simply too unfair."

Uriel stood up from the sofa and then walked over to the window. He placed his hand around Cassandra's waist, and then pressed his lips against her bare neck and began to caress her.

"...No. I'm not in the mood for that right now."

Cassandra smiled seductively, and then turned her back to him.

"How cold."

Uriel didn't seem too disappointed, rather, he just stared intently at Cassandra's back. The dress that Cassandra wore had a highly exposed back. Upon her bare skin, there was a tattoo-like pattern. It was only a few months ago that Uriel was told that the pattern was in fact the family crest of the Nehalenia Underworld Dragons — it was a <Seikoku> of incredible size. It was something that had happened not long after the dragon attack on the capital of Fontaine City.

"When will you awaken — Dark Dragon King Mordred?"

Uriel spoke with an eloquent tone towards Cassandra's back.

## Part 2

After the Five Hundred Years Festival ended, a week had passed, and the month of Scorpio approached. On the anniversary of the establishment of the Dragonar Academy in Ansarivan, the academy's uniforms changed along with the seasons, and all students transitioned into their winter uniforms. Once this season began, the temperature in the Knight Country would suddenly drop. With the arrival of the end of autumn, the atmosphere of winter gradually began to become stronger. Ash was still recuperating in the hospital. Half of his body was covered in bandages. The wind that poured in from the opening in the window sent a chill through to his bones. When he was brought into the hospital, the attending physician was astounded and said that it was already a miracle that he was still alive. The basic role of the Oracles used for healing was to improve a patient's ability to recover. If the injuries were minor, then the effect could be described as immediate, but it was impossible for immediately treat severely injured patients. It seemed as though his hospital life would have to continue for some time. But Ash didn't feel that a life like this was boring. After all, aside from Eco and Silvia, Rebecca, Lucca, Jessica and the others would often come to visit him. Moreover, Raymond, who had officially restored his connection to Brigid and Max, who had been discharged earlier also came to visit him in the hospital occasionally. Anya also came around to show her face on holidays. However, whenever Anya's name was brought up in any conversation, Eco, Silvia, Lucca and Jessica would all become rather vigilant. Thanks to the constant and frequent stream of visitors, even though Ash was hospitalised, there was no shortage of people who passed on news of the incident. In response to this incident, the statement published by the Knight Country's official government body was 'There were unknown persons who abused a sacred relic to cause Oscar and Tristan to go mad'. As a result, Oscar was also regarded as a victim, and thus pardoned on the grounds of innocence.

## Part 3

—...\*knock\*.....\*knock\*. At around ten o'clock that morning, someone knocked on the door of the patient room. The way that the person knocked on the door seemed a bit hesitant. As the examination rounds had been completed not long ago, it seemed unlikely that the person who knocked on the door was a doctor or a nurse. It wasn't noon yet either, so it definitely wasn't Eco who had difficulty getting up in the morning. But then again, Eco never knocked on the door when she entered.

"Please come in."

For the time being, Ash sat with his upper body upright, and then called out towards the door.

"...Long time no see, Ash."

Surprisingly, the person who appeared in the doorway was Oscar. Celes was behind her. It was the first time that both of them had come to visit. Both of them had rather serious expressions. After Ash gave a wry smile, he invited the two of them in.

"Don't just stand in the doorway, come in."

"Ah...pardon the intrusion."

After Oscar walked over to the side of the bed, she sat down in a chair. Celes silently stood behind her. For the first time, Ash thought to himself that Celes was 'acting like a maid'.

"I've really given you a lot of trouble this time...I'm sorry!"

After Oscar said that, she lowered her head to apologise. Celes also lowered her head while she lifted the hems of her apron with both hands.

"It's fine, Prince Uriel was the real culprit anyway. It's just good to see that Celes was willing to return to your side."

A slight smile finally appeared on Oscar's face.

“...It’s fair to say that Celes was supposed to have been executed as a criminal, but Princess Mirabel seems to have secretly helped to change that decision. It seems Princess Mirabel is rather interested in Pluto.”

After saying that, Oscar turned around to look at Celes who was behind her.

“Leaving those things aside, what really pained me was convincing Celes to come back to serve me.”

“Idiot! Why do you have to mention that...”

Celes immediately blushed, seemingly embarrassed, and acted in a rather self-conscious manner.

“B-By the way, Ash.”

Oscar suddenly turned back and looked up. Ash couldn’t help but take a deep breath. Although she was currently crossdressing, the way she acted still caused Ash’s heart to race. He couldn’t see the Oscar in front of him as anything more than a sweet and beautiful girl.

“Do you remember...you said that you would help me?”

“Of course. If it’s within my capabilities, I’d be willing to help.”

Ash nodded enthusiastically...this actually caused him some sharp pain in his neck, almost causing his expression to distort. But he didn’t want Oscar to worry, so he clenched his teeth and tried to remain calm.

“Ash...!”

In that instant, perhaps because Oscar felt deeply moved by his words, she leapt across and embraced him. Ash’s body couldn’t resist the shock, and he finally cried out in pain with ‘oww!’. Even so, Oscar still hugged onto Ash tightly. A sweet fragrance unsuited for the patient room wafted around, making Ash feel a bit dizzy. Although Oscar had crossdressed today, it seemed that she had put on women’s perfume.

“I’ve already resolved myself.”

With a particularly enticing tone, Oscar whispered into Ash’s ear

“When I defeat Uriel and officially take the throne, I will openly reveal my

identity as a woman to the nation. I want to be the first ruling queen in the history of the Chevron Kingdom. And during my reign, I will also abolish the rules that dictate only men can succeed the throne.”

“Your ambition is incredible! Although I can imagine that the process will be extremely difficult, I think it’s a wonderful dream.”

“So that’s why, when the time comes...I hope that you’ll marry me...not as Ashley, but as Ash Blake.”

“What did you say!?”

Ash’s eyes widened.

“The queen’s husband. That’s not a bad position, right? Of course, if we get married, and your status is still that of a commoner, it would be rather unbecoming. So please become a Chevron noble by then.”

“Slow down, aren’t you speaking too far into the future? Celes, help me persuade her!”

“The decision was made by Oscar. As her personal maid, I can only give my full support.”

After Celes coldly replied, she turned her face away. It was certainly a good thing that her attitude had returned to normal, but it looked like he would have some rather difficult days ahead of him....





“—We’re here, Ash!”

At that time, the door was suddenly pushed open as Eco rushed in like a bullet. Immediately afterwards, Silvia, Cosette, Jessica, Lucca and Rebecca also entered in that order. Although they were regular visitors of this room as well, they had chosen to appear at the worst possible time today. Oscar was still clinging onto Ash’s neck.

“Hey, Oscar! Everyone’s watching!”

“It doesn’t matter. We’re going to be a couple sooner or later anyway.”

Oscar effortlessly and expressionlessly replied.

—*Dododododododododododododododododododododododododo...!*

“You two b-boys...what are you doing!?”

Eco was trembling with rage.

“Oscar-san, you couldn’t have gone mad and crossed the gender barrier to fall in love with Ash, right!?”

Silvia’s face turned pale and her tightly-balled fists constantly trembled.

“But, with such a fine man like Ash-sama...it’s hard to blame you for falling in love with him.”

Unexpectedly, Jessica looked at Ash and Oscar with an inexplicable sense of enthusiasm in her eyes.

“The sin of lusting after a male...you would be sentenced to death in the village of Ecbald. You would also be hung up in public for a week...”



After Lucca muttered such a terrifying story, she shrank back like a rabbit. But among those present, aside from Ash, Rebecca and Celes, no one else actually knew that Oscar was a woman. Ash was actually quite a tight-lipped person, so he hadn't particularly publicised that secret. And then, Rebecca stepped forward to talk to Oscar.

"Oscar...our student council hopes to become your comrade. So why not tell the truth to all of these people?"

"...Yes, I guess you're right."

In response to Rebecca's suggestion, Oscar seemed slightly embarrassed, but she nodded with agreement in the end. While she continued to hug Ash, she turned around and looked at everyone.

"Umm...to be honest, I'm actually a woman. Once again, please look after me from now on."

"Hey, that's way too sudden!"

Ash shouted out, causing an abrupt pain at his ribs. There were a thousand different ways to reveal the truth, and it could even have been turned into an emotional story, but Oscar chose the worst possible way. As expected, the patient room was suddenly overwhelmed with noisy voices.

"Y-You say that you're a woman!? That makes the problem even worse!"

"That's right! Let go of Ash right away!"

Eco and Silvia shouted loudly one after the other.

"A-A woman, and also so beautiful...and also royalty of the Chevron Kingdom..."

Perhaps because she felt dizzy, Jessica's entire body became unsteady.

"Another strong rival...has appeared again."

Although Lucca's face appeared to hold no expression, she was tightly clenching both of her fists in front of her chest.

"Ufufu...it looks like the coming days will only get more chaotic."

"You're right about that."

Rebecca echoed Cosette's words with a wry smile. And right at that moment

“—Pardon the intrusion, Ash Blake!”

A woman in a wheelchair rushed in through the open door. That woman was not wearing her amour today, so for a moment, Ash was unable to recognise her—. Surprisingly, it was Veronica. The person pushing the wheelchair from behind was Glenn. It was only now that Ash realised Veronica was also staying in this hospital for recovery. Veronica had been sucked into Tristan's body, and although her life was not endangered, a lot of her spirit had been drained, and both of her legs were also fractured. Glenn, who was pushing the wheelchair, had also been seriously injured, but he returned to his job very quickly as the captain of the guard. He was one of the best examples of a Dragonar. As soon as he saw Veronica's face, Ash couldn't help but feel a tingle. He had this nagging feeling that he had forgotten something very important.

“...It seems like this isn't a place where I should stay for long.”

Oscar's instincts seemed to sense danger, so after letting go of Ash as if nothing had happened, she retired back to the wall. Unintentionally, Ash's eyes met with Silvia's. Silvia blushed shyly and then averted her gaze. At last, Ash finally remembered. Before the final battle began, Silvia made an oath on behalf of the other players. When he recalled the contents of that oath, Ash's cheeks began to burn. Silvia didn't publicly state the name of the person who had won over her heart. But, to Veronica, the answer should have been obvious. The most worrying issue for Ash was the fact that Veronica absolutely adored Silvia.

“Ash Blake! Silvia has become rather fascinated by you, so I've come to make things clear today!”

“Eeh!?”

“What, there's no need to be afraid. After all, before the two of us fully recover, there'll be plenty of time. My precious Silvia, I never imagined that you would actually, that you, that you w-would a-actually...damn it! Just thinking of that contestant's oath makes me furious!”

“Princess-sama, please calm down. Be careful with your body.”

Glenn attempted to soothe the emotional Veronica.

“Aneue, you’re forgetting that Ash is still severely injured!”

“Silence, Silvia!”

Although Silvia had summoned her greatest courage to help Ash, she was still silenced by Veronica with a single sentence.

“Listen up, Ash! I will also live in this room from today onwards! I will thoroughly investigate to see if you’re a man who’s truly worthy of Silvia!”

“No no, this is a private room!”

“What are you afraid of? I’ll have Glenn bring my bed over soon. Wash your face first and wait for me!”

“I must be having a nightmare...”

Ash hugged his head and lamented.

*I have to get out of the hospital as soon as I can* — Ash quietly decided in his mind. Inadvertantly, Ash looked at Oscar and Celes who had retreated back to the side of the wall. Oscar had vowed to become the first queen in the history of the Chevron Kingdom. Having set her sights on a new aspiration, her eyes appeared to shine brightly. Celes simply stared silently at the side of Ash’s face. It seemed unlikely that Oscar and Celes would ever go their separate ways in the future again. They would both work together from here on towards that path — its name was supremacy.

“The Avalon Knight Dragner II” is closed.

# References and Translation Notes

1.   ↑ Night Crawl (yobai): An old Japanese custom that involved a single man sneaking into a house with a single woman to ask for consensual sex. The intruder generally tries to avoid detection, but it may already be known by the family, and was sometimes considered a prelude to marriage.
2.   ↑ Meaning 'Sword of Light' or 'Shining Sword', Cláíomh Solais is a sword from Irish mythology used in many folktales as a heroic or divine sword.
3.   ↑ In Irish mythology, Tír na nÓg means 'Land of Youth' and is depicted as a supernatural realm of everlasting youth, beauty, health, abundance and joy.
4.   ↑ A respectful manner of addressing an older sister.
5.   ↑ A respectful manner of speaking about an older sister.
6.   ↑ 'Touki': Something like ki or aura or a 'fighting spirit'.